

THE HISTORY MANAGEMENT OF THE EAST-ELBIAN
NOBILITY AFTER 1945

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Abstract

This thesis undertakes a critical analysis of the history management of the East-Elbian nobility. Its central hypothesis is that noble families throughout the second half of the twentieth century deliberately sought to steer and control the public commemoration of their caste.

These efforts were a concerted assault on widely held views about the place of the nobility in recent history, and specifically, about their culpability in the disasters that brought about war, defeat and moral shame to Germany. The first phase of noble history management concerned an expressed 'resistance against Hitler' alignment and self-distancing from the regime. The second phase of history management strategically employed autobiographical and family chronicles to construct an image of a modest and industrious elite, deeply rooted in the ancient traditions and virtues of an apolitical East-Elbian estate society.

This dissertation argues that the process of history management continued after German reunification in 1989-1990, when many former refugee families returned to their old estates in East Elbia.

For my parents

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Introduction

In an article in *Die Zeit* newspaper in 1952, Marion Countess Dönhoff stated that: “every nation has its own specific way of transforming historic events into legends or symbols, and surely in the end, the legend often significantly deviates from the actual events.”¹ What Dönhoff attributed to nations was also true for her own social class. In the second half of the twentieth century, noble writers embarked on a journey to alter and reconstruct the narrative of the nobility’s role during the Third Reich, a journey that we might call the ‘history management’ of the East-Elbian nobility.

Up until the eve of the First World War, the East-Elbian nobility had been remarkably successful in preserving its traditional power status within German society. This power was maintained through a series of very robust networks, with the most important being the military. Although the noble share of the Prussian officer corps declined from 65 per cent in 1860 to 30 per cent in 1914, all of the imperial army’s eight army commanders and twenty-five corps commanders, and the majority of officers from the rank of colonel upward, were noble.² The leading posts among the bureaucracy were also firmly in the hands of the nobility. This was especially true of the Foreign Office. In 1914, the Reich’s ambassadors comprised eight princes, twenty-nine counts, twenty barons, fifty-four lesser nobles, and a mere eleven

¹ Marion Dönhoff, *Auflehnung gegen den Helden*, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1952.

² Macgregor Knox, *To the threshold of power, 1922/1933. Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Social Dictatorships*, Volume I (Cambridge, 2007), p. 73; see also: Detlef Bald, *Vom Kaiserheer zur Bundeswehr. Sozialstruktur des Militärs. Politik der Rekrutierung von Offizieren und Unteroffizieren* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981), pp. 85–96.

commoners.³

Furthermore, the nobility showed an astonishing perseverance economically. At the end of the 19th century, the landed nobility in East Elbia still held more than 70 per cent of the large estates exceeding 1,000 hectares, as well as a staggering 97 per cent of the estates spanning more than 10,000 hectares.⁴ Even though the high protective tariffs for German agricultural products, which had shielded the profitability of these estates under Bismarck, were gradually abandoned at the turn of the century, strong agrarian pressure groups such as the Agrarian League (Bund der Landwirte), which was effectively dominated by the noble estate owners, continued to ensure high state subsidies, massive tax reliefs and high prices for agricultural goods.⁵ Thus, although contemporaries like Max Weber spoke of the nobility as being in 'economic agony',⁶ "the Junkers nevertheless gripped firmly their backward quarter of Germany east of the Elbe".⁷

The end of the First World War, however, marked a sharp caesura. The entire system that had sustained the nobles' political power was torn apart. In 1918, the Kaiser fled to Holland, and Germany became a republic. The army was in a shambles; officers had their epaulettes torn off, and the navy mutinied in

³ Knox, *Threshold*, p. 73.

⁴ Johannes Conrad, Die Latifundien im preußischen Osten, in: Johannes Conrad (ed.), *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, Volume 16 (n.a., 1888), pp. 141–145.

⁵ Walter Demel und Sylvia Schraut, *Der Deutsche Adel: Lebensformen und Geschichte* (Munich, 2014), p. 102.

⁶ Max Weber, *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik. Akademische Antrittsrede*, in: MWG I/4, p. 567, quoted from: Cornelius Torp, *Max Weber und die Preussischen Junker* (Tuebingen, 1998), p. 100.

⁷ Knox, *Threshold*, p. 73.

Kiel.⁸ The Treaty of Versailles cut back the officer corps to a mere 4,000 men, and Article 109 of the new Weimar constitution formally abolished the nobility as a privileged class.⁹ In the Weimar Republic, the horizons of the nobility narrowed. They became involved in insular interest politics, focused on securing the remnants of their power by finding right wing partners with whom to destroy the influence of the political left.

In 1932-33, the nobility played a conspicuous role in the destruction of the Weimar Republic and entered into a fateful alliance with Hitler. As a result of their deepening relationship with the extreme right, in particular, the Nazi party, the nobility emerged profoundly damaged from the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945. If 1918 had disrupted the historical continuity of the noble networks, 1945 brought a fundamental rupture with the past. Large parts of the nobility had been drawn into the leadership apparatus of the regime, thus their reputations were deeply contaminated. Conversely, even those who had remained politically uncompromised faced the reprisals of the Soviets. The Russians made no distinction between 'good' and 'bad' members of the nobility. In East Elbia, all members of the nobility were either killed or expelled, and their estates were expropriated. Stunned, broken, fragmented, displaced and no longer occupying their traditional positions of

⁸ These revolutionary attacks on the officers' insignia of power became one of the leitmotifs of noble recollections of the revolutionary upheavals in 1918-19. See: Stephan Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin, 2003), p. 204.

⁹ Christoph Franke, *Der sächsische Adel im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert. Soziales Verhalten und soziale Strukturen*, in: Silke Marburg und Josef Matzerath (eds), *Der Schritt in die Moderne – Sächsischer Adel zwischen 1763 und 1918* (Cologne, 2001), pp. 201, 202.

social leadership, the nobility were forced to regroup in the West under entirely new conditions and find a way to re-establish themselves.

State of Research

Despite the immense social and political importance of the nobility throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the class has not attracted the deserved degree of scholarly attention afforded to the labour force or the bourgeoisie. Two early post-war publications established opposing approaches to the subject between which would fall much of the subsequent literature. Francis L. Carsten's overview of the history of the Junkers was a swingeing critique of an elite that had always misused the power it refused to relinquish.¹⁰ In contrast, Walter Görlitz' early post-war study on the East-Elbian nobility combined masses of statistical information with an idealised collective portrait. It was spiced with insider information, and reminiscent, in some respects, of the novels of Theodor Fontane.¹¹ Neither study was successful in stimulating much further scholarly enquiry.

Since the late 1980s, however, there has been growing interest in the German nobility of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, driven mainly by a group of scholars working around Heinz Reif, the first historian of the Bielefeld School to focus his attention primarily on the nobility, rather

¹⁰ Francis L. Carsten, *Geschichte der preußischen Junker* (Frankfurt a. M., 1988).

¹¹ Walter Görlitz, *Die Junker, Adel und Bauer im deutschen Osten: Geschichtliche Bilanz von 7 Jahrhunderten* (Glücksburg, 1957).

than the bourgeoisie or the working class. Reif's study of the Westphalia nobility, based on twenty-five noble families in the archbishopric of Münster, focused on the decades between 1770 and 1860, and showed, by means of a multi-generational collective biography, how a nobility anchored in semi-feudal institutions of the old regime overcame the challenges of revolution and refashioned itself as a regional elite whose elevated social status commanded the respect of large parts of society.¹²

An interest in the strategies adopted by noble networks in response to the challenges of political, economic and social change has remained central to the literature. Dominic Lieven's comparative analysis of the British, Prussian and Russian nobilities explores how the ruling classes of Europe confronted and managed processes of modernisation. He suggests that in southern Germany, expropriations and the loss of seigniorial powers led to the marginalisation and political irrelevance of the regional nobilities, whereas the nobilities of Prussia proved highly successful at managing the transition from manorial lordship to agribusiness, despite shedding land in the process of peasant emancipation.¹³ Wolfram G. Theilemann's account of Prussian noble country life in the Kaiserreich focuses on noble management of forest reserves to argue that the landed nobility of the Prussian provinces entered into a partial amalgam with other elites of property and capital in the late nineteenth century. Here, as in the studies by Reif and Lieven, the research

¹² See: Heinz Reif, *Westfälischer Adel 1770–1860: vom Herrschaftsstand zur regionalen Elite* (Göttingen, 1979); Idem, *Adelserneuerung und Adelsreform in Deutschland 1815–1874*, in: Elisabeth Fehrenbach (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland 1770–1884* (Munich, 1994), pp. 203–230; Idem, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1999).

¹³ Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815–1914* (London, 1992).

method adopted combined social, economic and cultural perspectives and was focused on the strategies adopted by the nobility to secure collective survival.¹⁴

Hartwin Spenkuch's study of the Prussian House of Lords uses an analysis of a noble-dominated parliamentary body to explore the relative influence of the Prussian nobility, the state bureaucracy, and the bourgeois middle class. Spenkuch argues that the *Herrenhaus* remained, throughout its history, a stronghold of aristocratic power, and thus a bulwark against the 'bourgeoisification' of politics and public life.¹⁵ An important compilation of articles edited by Hans-Ulrich Wehler illuminate how certain parts of nobility used the processes of professionalisation and acclimatisation to market conditions to merge with a broader elite of 'notables', while paradoxically, other nobles used exactly the same techniques to secure their status as a caste separate from bourgeois society.¹⁶ Elisabeth Fehrenbach's edited volume on the nobility and the bourgeoisie in early nineteenth-century Germany reached a slightly different verdict, suggesting that, for the most part, the amalgamation of noble and bourgeois elites remained contingent and incomplete; there was no 'symbiosis of elites'.¹⁷

Many of the contributions to the important volume edited by Heinz Reif explore how the nobilities (of Prussia in particular) succeeded in staying 'on

¹⁴ Wolfram G. Theilemann, *Adel im grünen Rock. Adliges Jügertum, Großprivatwaldbesitz und die preußische Forstbeamtenschaft 1866–1914* (Berlin, 2011).

¹⁵ Hartwin Spenkuch, *Das Preußische Herrenhaus, Adel und Bürgertum in der ersten Kammer des Landtages 1854–1918* (Düsseldorf, 1998).

¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950* (Göttingen, 1990).

¹⁷ Elisabeth Fehrenbach (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland 1770–1884* (Munich, 1994).

top', despite the loss of seigniorial privileges, while others focus on the experiences of rupture and corporate failure that were also a feature of the nobility's path to modernity.¹⁸ The tension between the successful maintenance of a position of dominance, and the repeated shocks to the societal structures of noble privilege, are also at the centre of Monika Wienfort and Eckart Conze's collection *Adel und Moderne*.¹⁹

These studies are concerned above all with illuminating the contours of social change. The study of how noble networks mobilised as collective actors is far less well developed. Shelly Baranowski's *The Sanctity of Rural Life* underscores the close affinities between Junkerdom and Nazism, focussing on collaboration between members of the Pomeranian nobility and the ascendant NSDAP in the Weimar Republic. The book thus offers a partial refutation of those studies that sought to merge the modern Prussian nobility into a modern composite elite.²⁰ Iris von Hoyningen-Huene's analysis of the nobility during the Weimar Republic also shows how the possession of landed property protected the provincial nobilities from the pressure to modernise.²¹ Further works on specific families and regions contribute to our understanding of the motives driving noble political and social networks

¹⁸ Heinz Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland, Bd. 1, Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2000); Idem (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland, Bd. 2, Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2002).

¹⁹ Eckart Conze und Monika Wienfort (eds) *Adel und Moderne, Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2004).

²⁰ Shelley Baranowski, *The Sanctity of Rural Life. Nobility, Protestantism and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (NY, 1995); Idem, East Elbian Landed Elites and Germany's Turn To Fascism: The Sonderweg Controversy Revisited, in: *European History Quarterly*, 2/1996, pp. 209–240.

²¹ Iris Freifrau von Hoyningen-Huene, *Adel in der Weimarer Republik* (Limburg a. d. Lahn, 1992).

between the First and the Second World War. This is especially true of studies on the members of the military resistance.²² However, the pre-eminent work in this field is Stephan Malinowski's prodigiously researched study of the nobility's role in German politics between 1918 and 1945. Drawing on material from the archive of the Deutsche Adelgenossenschaft (DAG), NSDAP depositories, and numerous collections of private papers, Malinowski highlights the synergies between noble political mobilisation and the rise of the NSDAP, identifying not only moments of collaboration, but also a fundamental concordance in values and outlook.²³

Furthermore, there exists a large quantity of literature which treats the nobility as an object of historiographical critique, holding it accountable for Germany's fateful role in the twentieth century. Hans-Ulrich Wehler places central focus on the East-Elbian nobility in his writings about Germany's *Sonderweg*. According to him, the maintenance of noble influence in Weimar politics ultimately led to the destruction of the republic. Not only did the nobility succeed in building up a unified anti-republican army in anticipation for a revisionist war under an authoritarian regime, but it also set the course for a formal alliance between the nobility and National Socialism as early as

²² See: Eckart Conze, *Von deutschem Adel: die Grafen Bernstorff im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2000); Mario Niemann, *Mecklenburgischer Großgrundbesitz im Dritten Reich. Soziale Struktur, wirtschaftliche Stellung und politische Bedeutung* (Cologne, 2000); Bodo Scheurig, *Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin. Ein Konservativer gegen Hitler* (Oldenburg, 1968); Idem, *Henning von Tresckow. Ein Preuße gegen Hitler* (Hamburg, 2004); Ulrich Heinemann, *Ein Konservativer Rebell. Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg und der 20. Juli* (Berlin, 1990); Peter Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (Stuttgart, 1992); Detlef Graf von Schwerin, *'Dann Sind's Die Besten Köpfe, Die Man Henkt': Die Junge Generation Im Deutschen Widerstand* (Munich, 1991).

²³ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*.

the winter of 1932-33.²⁴ Wehler thus argues that due to a failure to destroy the paramount political and social influence of the reactionary Junkers, Germany was prevented from achieving the social and political reforms necessary for the introduction of liberal and democratic progress. Conversely, the Junkers not only destroyed the development of democracy during the Weimar Republic, but also directly supported Hitler's rise to power, and may therefore be considered partly culpable for the catastrophes of the Second World War.

Hans Rosenberg adopts a similar view in his essay *Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse*, in which he argues that even in their self-inflicted downfall, the old elites played a crucial, albeit predominantly catastrophic role, in the Weimar Republic. Nobility were partly responsible for the destruction of the parliamentary democracy, and the restoration and sanction of authoritarian and dictatorial forms of government, while during the Third Reich, they assumed roles of beneficiaries, followers, tools, dupes, persecutees and heroic resistance fighters.²⁵ Similarly, Heinrich August Winkler claims "that no other elite worked as early, as actively and as successful on the destruction of the Weimar Democracy as the East-Elbian Junkertum."²⁶

²⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Volume 4 (Munich, 1987), pp. 326–332.

²⁵ Hans Rosenberg, *Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse*, in: Hans Rosenberg (ed.), *Machteliten Und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen: Studien Zur Neueren Deutschen Sozial- Und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 31* (Göttingen, 1978), p. 84.

²⁶ Heinrich August Winkler, *Requiem für eine Republik. Zum Problem der Verantwortung für das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie*, in: Peter Steinbach und Johannes Tuchel

However, while attention towards the history of the nobility up until the end of the Second World War has recently increased, it seems as though the period after the withdrawal of the East-Elbian nobility from the political stage in 1945 has not garnered considerable academic interest. The body of source material concerning nobility post-Second World War appears to be very sparse. There is one outstanding study of note: in his book *Von deutschem Adel*, Eckart Conze examines the history of three landed houses of the Counts Bernstorff between 1890 and 1960. The focus is placed not on the nobility as a social stratum, but on the struggle of individuals to compensate for the erosion of their privilege and the loss of revenues. What is interesting about Conze's investigation from the perspective of this dissertation is that it examines, among other things, the mutations in "noble mentality and patterns of cultural interpretation" by means of which the nobility sustained a sense of subjective cohesion, even at times when its objective standing was under existential threat.²⁷ Further, Stephan Malinowski and Markus Funck touch upon the importance of noble autobiographies in post-war Germany in their article *Masters of Memory*.²⁸ Walter Demel also offers a short and

(eds), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn, 1994), S. 54–67; Also see: Heinrich August Winkler (ed.), *Die Deutsche Staatskrise 1930–1933: Handlungsspielräume Und Alternativen* (Munich, 1992); also see: Wolfgang Zollitsch, *Adel und adlige Machteliten in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik: Standespolitik und agrarische Interessen*, in: Heinrich August Winkler, *Die Deutsche Staatskrise 1930–33: Handlungsspielräume und Alternativen* (Munich, 1992), pp. 239–256.

²⁷ Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*; also see: Eckart Conze, *Edelmann als Bürger?*, in: Manfred Hettling und Bernd Ulrich (eds), *Bürgertum nach 1945* (Hamburg, 2005); Eckart Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels – Marion Gräfin Dönhoff und das Bild des Widerstands gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 51:4 (2003).

²⁸ Marcus Funck and Stephan Malinowski, *Masters of Memory: The Strategic Use of Autobiographical Memory by the German Nobility*, in: Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche

superficial account of the nobility's post-war history in his contribution to a jointly authored study.²⁹ Michael Seelig's important recent study builds on the work of Conze to explore how noble identity reconstituted itself after the existential crisis of 1945. Seelig's book is particularly relevant to this dissertation, because it touches on the forms of communication through which families rebuilt a sense of collective purpose after expropriation and expulsion. Seelig is more interested in the processes of social and ideological self-positioning than in the techniques of history management analysed herein, however his work exemplifies how to approach phenomena pertaining to the consciousness of a large and diverse social group in the absence of a single, concentrated body of sources.³⁰

Methodology

After the Second World War, East-Elbian noblemen and -women adopted strategies to manage the legacy of the Nazi era. It was partly a matter of processing trauma and partly of decontaminating the past – and by consequence, the present – through a process of retrospective distancing from the regime. There was nothing particularly unusual about this. West German society underwent a long and complex process after 1945 that has

(eds), *The Work Of Memory. New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Chicago, 2002).

²⁹ Walter Demel und Sylvia Schraut, *Der Deutsche Adel: Lebensformen und Geschichte* (Munich, 2014).

³⁰ Michael Seelig, *Alltagsadel. Der ehemalige ostelbische Adel in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945/49-1975* (Cologne, 2015).

sometimes been referred to as “coming to terms with the past”.³¹ More recently, some historians have criticised the term “coming to terms with the past” for its nebulosity. As Norbert Frei has argued, the thematic spectrum covered by this diffuse concept includes – to name only a few – “the social history of compensation and the policy towards the victims of National Socialism, engagement with the past in schools, science and the media, as well as an examination of judicial policy”.³²

A further problem with the concept of “coming to terms with the past” relates to the nebulosity of the process it describes. The term implies (without explicitly defining) a specific and definitive outcome of some kind, a point at which the past will have been ‘mastered’. Yet, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether or when an individual or group has actually ‘come to terms’ with the past. It is a figure of speech that mystifies rather than clarifies society’s relationship with history and past experience. And there are problems with the transferability of psychic processes of trauma recovery in individuals to large groups or, *a fortiori*, to complex societies whose members do not, as a general rule, participate in shared psychic states.

³¹ See: Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001); Richard Matthias Müller, *Norma-Null und die Zukunft der deutschen Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Scherfeld, 1994); Klaus Sühl (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung 1945 und 1989. Ein unmöglicher Vergleich?* (Berlin, 1994); Armin Mohler, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Krefeld, 1980); Eckhard Jesse und Konrad Löw (eds), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Berlin, 1997); Meinhard Adler, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 1990); Gary Schaal und Andreas Wöll (eds), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Modelle der politischen und sozialen Integration in der bundesdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1997).

³² Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996), p. 12.

In order to escape the diffuseness of “coming to terms with the past” and the moral (and moralising) debates associated with it, Norbert Frei coined the term *Vergangenheitspolitik* to describe a more compact and practice-oriented process. This political process took place in the first half of the 1950s, with the West German government catering to widespread popular demands and giving mass amnesty to war criminals, minor offenders and compromised civil servants to integrate former Nazis into a functioning democracy and strengthen the inner unity of the German population.³³

Another interpretative category that has received a lot of attention in this context is the ‘politics of memory’, a rather approximate translation of *Geschichtspolitik*. First used by the political scientists Klaus Leggewie and Erik Meyer to analyse the controversy around a proposed monument to the Holocaust in Berlin, *Geschichtspolitik* was about the policies developed to address “the legacy of past atrocities - primarily prosecutions, truth-telling, memorialization, and reparations.”³⁴ In a series of essays and books, Edgar Wolfrum expanded the scope of the term, which he defined as “a political field of action in which different political actors try to laude the past with special interests and contend for its approval in the public.”³⁵

³³ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 13.

³⁴ Katherine Hite, Cath Collins and Alfredo Joignant, The Politics of Memory in Chile, in: Cath Collins, Katherine Hite and Alfredo Joignant (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Chile: From Pinochet to Bachelet*, (Boulder, 2013), p. 1.

³⁵ Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989 – Phasen und Kontroversen*, in: Edgar Wolfrum und Petra Bock (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit: Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im europäischen Vergleich*, (Göttingen, 1999), p. 58.

The politics of memory, Wolfrum argued, ultimately turned on a set of questions about which individuals or agencies possessed the power or authority to shape public discourse by excluding some memories from the public sphere and promoting others. From this it followed that the culture of memory was highly sensitive to political change. Wolfrum's influential study of the years 1949 to 1989 was in effect a political history of the Federal Republic as reflected through public discourses of memory. In the immediate post-war era, Wolfrum argued, debates around public memory did not focus on the atrocities of the Nazi era, about which there was a relatively muted discussion, but rather around the question of whether the Federal Republic would strive for a reunited Germany within the borders of 1937 or evolve into a post-national province of a united western Europe.

The focus shifted in 1953, when a major uprising broke out in the German Democratic Republic triggering a range of competing interpretations from the major West German political parties, each of which sought to situate the uprising vis-a-vis a specific tradition or political memory. The SPD saw the revolt as an expression of a continuing popular attachment to the vanished German nation-state and simultaneously as a twofold revolution against the socialist dictatorship in the east and the western-oriented policies of Konrad Adenauer, which were seen as purchasing a future in close association with the west, at the expense of the national past. The FDP, by contrast, read the uprising as a continuation of the German liberal movement of the nineteenth century. The CDU rejected these mnemonic strategies, insisting on the fresh start of 1945/1949 and the urgency of pursuing a policy of integration with the West. In the following years the SPD and the unions tried to keep alive

the idea of a united Germany in the borders of 1937 by staging symbolic fires from Helgoland to the Zugspitze and organising relays to the German borders. The strong electoral wins of the CDU, however, encouraged Adenauer to increase the westernisation of German politics and expedite European integration.³⁶ In these political struggles, memory was refracted through the lens of political influence and interest.

Only in the 1960s, Wolfrum argues, did the politics of public memory begin to focus on moral issues arising from the criminality of the Nazi regime. But here, too, there was an intimate connection with contemporary politics. With the construction of the Berlin Wall, hopes of an imminent reunification receded. The Fischer controversy called into question the carefully nurtured division between a good Kaiserreich and an evil Third Reich and instead emphasised the continuity of German nationalism, militarism and aggression. The Eichmann and Auschwitz trials began to sensitise the German public to the crimes committed in Germany's name. The *Ostpolitik* of Chancellor Willy Brandt marked the final break with the old German Empire. His genuflection before the monument to the victims of Nazi atrocities in the aftermath of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising symbolised West Germany's acceptance of its responsibility for war crimes and genocide. And the treaties with Poland, which settled the Oder-Neisse boundary as the permanent German border in the east, finalised the territorial discontinuity with the old Reich. This in turn led, Wolfrum suggests, to a realignment of public memory and new historical positioning (*Verortung*) of the Federal

³⁶ Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, pp. 62, 63.

Republic. Liberal achievements of the nineteenth century such as the Hambacher Fest (1832) or the German Revolutions of 1848 became tradition-building symbols of the Federal Republic and encouraged the emergence of a specifically West German identity founded on specifically West German traditions and memories.³⁷

But the return of the CDU to power in 1982 brought a new turn in the politics of memory. There were efforts from conservative circles to normalise German history and to relativize the public focus on Germany's special burden of guilt for the atrocities during the war. The ensuing *Historikerstreit* was really about how the Nazi era should be remembered. Hence the commotion around the title of Andreas Hillgruber's book *Zweierlei Untergang* which triggered the opening salvos in the controversy: Hillgruber's title appeared to imply an equivalence between the holocaust and the defeat of Germany at the hands of the Red Army. Was it admissible to remember German troops on the eastern front during the apocalyptic final phase of the war as in some respects positive figures who had given or risked their lives in order to stop or slow the advance of a Red Army whose conquest would bring ruin, death and rape upon the German population? (This was the question Hillgruber posed.) Or should the horrors of the holocaust and the immense destruction wrought by the Hitler regime upon the population of the Soviet Union militate against adopting the subject positions of troops locked in a losing war in the east as the yardstick for memory and

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 68-70.

understanding?³⁸

With the fall of the Wall the situation changed once again. Under the watchful eyes of the global public Germany's political elite aligned itself with the open and visible acceptance of German guilt and responsibility, best expressed in the Holocaust memorial in central Berlin inaugurated in 2005. This acknowledgement of the centrality of the holocaust in German public memory has since been the dominant articulation of Germany's new *Geschichtspolitik*.³⁹

Wolfrum's is a powerful reading of the place of memory in German politics since the end of the Second World War. From the perspective of this enquiry it has the merit that it focuses not just on the practical measures and legislative initiatives that were at the centre of Norbert Frei's *Vergangenheitspolitik*, but connects politics with the management of memory, of what is seen and valued in the past and what is occluded from view. The relevance of this approach to my thesis is obvious, since the struggle of the East-Elbian nobility to re-establish themselves in the post-war West German state focused precisely on the effort to build serviceable memories for new generations. As we shall see, the sea-change in German memory cultures in the 1960s and again in 1990s, driven both by political change and by

³⁸ See: Ernst Reinhard Pieper (ed.), *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, (Munich, 1987); Ernst Nolte, *Das Vergehen der Vergangenheit. Antwort an meine Kritiker im sogenannten Historikerstreit*, (Berlin, 1987); Richard J. Evans, *Im Schatten Hitlers? Historikerstreit und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in der Bundesrepublik*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1991).

³⁹ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit – Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, (Munich, 2006), p. 113.

generational succession, can also be discerned in the noble efforts to manage their own history and reputation.

On the other hand, there are also limits to the applicability of the term *Geschichtspolitik* to the phenomena analysed in this thesis. As the word itself suggests, it is a concept focused on the actions of governments, political parties and their agents. The politics of memory is about *power* and political influence. Memory, by this reading, is a tool of power and a dependent variable of political history. Power is of course implicated in the history of how the East-Elbian nobility rebuilt their reputation and social position after 1945. But the polarities are here to some extent reversed. Memory, in the context of this thesis, was not the expression or instrument of a regime of power or of competing political interests, but rather, as we shall see, the *means by which* a specific social group sought to recuperate part of the social power it had lost.

My main focus is the means by which the East-Elbian nobility deployed representations of the recent past after 1945 in order not only to compensate for its collectively experienced trauma of expulsion, but also build its reputation in the present, and renew its claim to an elevated social position. I intend, furthermore, to determine by which techniques the nobility presumed to achieve these goals, how successful these techniques proved, and how they changed when the generation who had actively engaged in the war was replaced by those whom were born after the expulsion.

This thesis will therefore follow Frei in focussing not on states of mind or *political* 'instrumentalization of the past'⁴⁰ but rather on the material strategies adopted by a social group in order to construct, legitimise and defend a specific narrative of that group's past. It draws from the *Geschichtspolitik* literature the insight that memory and political or social power are intertwined and that public memories are as mutable as the political environments in which they take root. But neither *Vergangenheitspolitik* nor *Geschichtspolitik* will serve as the hermeneutic devices driving this enquiry. In their place, I propose 'history management', a fairly transparent and methodologically modest phrase denoting the efforts of an individual or group to shape perceptions of that group's or individual's past. History management can take many forms: it may mean intervening in public discourses; it may involve cultivating collective memories and traditions of a specific network or social groups; it may involve manufacturing historical narratives; or it can entail restricting access to problematic information.

Thus this thesis will ultimately deal with several intertwined strands of past-oriented behaviour. I deal first with the construction of compensatory narratives as a means of heroising the past and sustaining trans-historical identities. I then turn to the reputation-building narratives designed to exculpate the nobility and elevate their standing in the present. Lastly, this thesis engages with interventions in the domain of historical knowledge and debate.

⁴⁰ Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, p. 274.

Structure

This dissertation is structured chronologically. Its main focus is directed towards the era between the end of the Second World War and the partial return of noble families to East Elbia after German reunification in 1990.

The crucial point of departure of the nobility's post-war history management is its strategic association with the military resistance. The gradual transfiguration of the 20 July Plot into a noble revolt allowed the nobility to deviate attention from its fateful alliance with Hitler, and instead, entrench the nobility on the right side of history. At the end of the war, however, the nobility's purported resistance against Hitler was still tainted by treason and therefore, did not qualify as a suitable tool with which to rebuild their shattered reputation.

The first chapter of the dissertation therefore deals with the efforts launched by individuals, as well as government agencies, to rehabilitate the commemoration of the military resistance, detach it from other forms of resistance – notably that of the communists – and incorporate it into the founding myth of the newly established Federal Republic. Building on this, the second chapter will assess how noble writers made use of this revaluation of the military resistance and remodelled it into a revolt of the nobility. The third chapter examines the nobility's widespread use of the autobiography as a tool for retrospectively shaping and constructing a favourable public perception of their role as an indulgent elite in an archaic and nostalgic land east of the Elbe River. Chapter Four deals with the great

importance the nobility assigned (and still assigns) to the cultivation of memory. The family chronicles reviewed here not only give an insight into how skeletal and fabricated the official infra-corporate narratives of noble families are, but also how these accounts are used strategically to delegitimise the post-war settlement and sustain a continued habitus of superiority. Chapter Five is concerned with the partial return of the nobility to East Elbia after German reunification. It critically assesses how returned nobles make use of their long family history to succeed socially and economically in the present. The final chapter is a case study of a specific noble family's history management. It not only illustrates how noble families in certain circumstances are charged with managing their own history, but also examines the dangers that may arise should a family lose control of the process of history management.

Terms and Problems

For a number of reasons, this thesis has explicitly opted to use the term 'East-Elbian' rather than 'Prussian' nobility. It is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to give a comprehensive definition of the Prussian nobility. Unlike France or England, Prussia was never really a nation state, but rather, an artificial amalgam of provinces held together by the Hohenzollern family. Within this conglomeration of territories were numerous very distinct and powerful regional noble elites, such as the East-Prussian, Pomeranian and Silesian nobilities, or after 1815, the nobilities of the Rhineland and Westphalia. Their one shared trait was their supposed loyalty to the Prussian

king. Yet, they never formed any sort of homogenous, national elite that could be defined as 'Prussian nobility'.

More importantly, however, the time period covered by this thesis dictates a restriction to a specific region, as the breakup of Prussia in 1947 had significantly different ramifications on the various regional noble elites. Whereas western provinces such as Westphalia, the Rhineland or Schleswig-Holstein remained part of the Federal Republic of Germany, Prussia's eastern territories fell under communist rule. Therefore, the post-war history of the nobility in the west differs so significantly from its counterpart in the east that it is inexpedient to include the entirety of the formerly Prussian noble elites in one sample.

The term East Elbia, conversely, not only refers to a specific region east of the river Elbe but also to the socio-political peculiarities of a larger region within Prussia. For centuries, large estates, Protestantism (with a strong pietistic fringe) and staunch political conservatism dominated this region and by the turn of the century its powerful nobility was widely perceived as a reactionary, narrow-minded and politically retrograde elite.⁴¹ At the end of the Second World War, this region collectively experienced the trauma of expropriation and expulsion. This expulsion makes the East-Elbian noblemen and -women somewhat unique among the German nobility, since it created a kind of noble displacement similar to that experienced by the Russian nobility in 1918. It is exactly this common denominator of a specific

⁴¹ See the section "State of Research" in the introduction of this thesis.

reputation and collective expulsion that makes a study of their history management so interesting.

On rare occasions the author has opted also to include examples of noblemen who are not, at first glance, typical East-Elbians but who have all been strongly socialised by the East-Elbian networks, in particular for example through their maternal families or education in a Prussian cadet school or regiment.⁴² Families like the Schulenburgs or Bernstorffs whose landed interest was mainly situated just west of the river Elbe were incorporated into this thesis because they were heavily intermarried with East Elbian families and because their lifestyle, outlook and values largely coincided with those of the East-Elbian nobility. On top of that those families equally shared the experience of expulsion in 1945.

All expressions, organisations and quotations have as far as possible been translated into English. The remaining italicised German expressions are either absorbed into current English usage (such as *Freikorps*), or could not be translated (such as *Heimat*) and are explained in the text or in the footnotes. Some of the most important German terms used (such as *Ständestaat*,

⁴² Exemplary in this context is Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg. Born in Potsdam, von Schweppenburg, on his maternal side, belonged to the old Prussian noble family of von Hülsen. Two of his forefathers had been Prussian field marshals and for years he had been socialized in the royal war colleges in Potsdam and Berlin. See: Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monty and Rommel – Parallel Lives*, (London, 2012), pp. 338-339; Also see Enno von Rintelen, the son of an ennobled Prussian Lieutenant-General. Rintelen was born in Stettin, Pomerania and spent the first decade of his military career with the 1st Pomeranian grenadier regiment "König Friedrich-Wilhelm-IV". See: www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Personenregister/R/RintelenEnnov.htm; Franz von Papen had also been educated in a Prussian cadet school at Berlin Groß-Lichterfelde. See: Henry and Robin Adams, *Rebel Patriot*, (Santa Barbara, 1987), p. 1.

translated as corporative state) have been translated but also provided in German in brackets.

The Establishment of 20 July 1944 in Public Memory

Introduction

20 July 1944 was the darkest day in the history of the German army. Men who wore the soldier's coat of honour became criminals and cold-blooded assassins. They tried to launch a stab in the back, which – had they prevailed – would have led to Germany's total destruction.

Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Nr. 229, 20. August 1944

20 July 1944 was a turning point in German history. Officers risked the 'revolt of conscience' and gave their lives. They restored Germany's honour and dignity, which had been robbed by the Nazi-criminals. The courageous act of 20 July was the essential prerequisite for Germany's return into the community of civilised nations.¹

Volker Rühe (Germany's Defence Secretary)
50-year anniversary of the failed coup, 1994

Within the span of 50 years, the German national historical consensus had radically changed. The military resistance against Hitler, once vilified, had been transformed into one of the few beacons of light to emerge from Germany's darkest days. This change in the national story was instigated by many players, from all sides of the political and academic spectrum; whether

¹ Volker Rühe, *Aufstand des Gewissens*, Rede des Bundesministers der Verteidigung anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ausstellung "Aufstand des Gewissens" am 19. Juli 1994 im Zweiten Dienstsitz des Bundesministeriums der Verteidigung, Berlin, online at: www.20-juli-44.de.

from resistance fighters themselves, politicians such as Theodor Heuss, journalists such as Marion Countess Dönhoff, or academics such as Hans Rothfels and Gerhard Ritter. As the number of such voices grew, so too did the involvement of nobility in this discourse.

This chapter focuses primarily on the groups and protagonists who played a role in rehabilitating the resistance as an object of public discourse. Understanding this process of rehabilitation is absolutely crucial, since without the positive spin put on the military resistance, the nobility would lack the single most important factor in the restoration of their reputation.

The Regime's Reaction to the Coup

Immediately after the failed coup, the regime's propaganda machine went to work to discredit not only the motives of the military resistance, but also to defame and demonise the conspirators. In a newsreel on the evening of 20 July 1944, only hours after the attempted coup, Hitler set the tone by blaming a very small clique of "conscienceless and criminal officers who plotted to liquidate [him]".² In the following days, Joseph Goebbels, Reich minister of propaganda, initiated a campaign to destroy any possible sympathies for the plot among the German people. The German public was bombarded with articles throughout the following weeks. The party newspaper *Völkische*

² Max Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945. Kommentiert von einem Zeitgenossen*, Volume 2: Untergang 1939–1945 (Würzburg, 1963), p. 2128.

Beobachter published its tirades day in and day out.³ Additionally, other newspapers, such as the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, quickly followed suit, condemning the conspirators of 'high treason' and of opening up "a fifth front, a front of murder, perfidy and shame".⁴

Even at this very early stage, the regime linked the plot – albeit in a negative sense – with the values of the social elite whose representatives had played such a prominent role. A week after the attempted coup, Goebbels himself published an article in the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* accusing the conspirators of being ensnared in the feudal traditions of the seventeenth century, and thus unable to accept social change.⁵ This diagnosis, which established a strong link between the conspirators and the supposedly obsolete and effete traditions of the nobility, was reinforced by Robert Ley, head of the German Labour Front, who described the conspirators as a small 'noble clique' whom "should be exterminated root and branch".⁶ At the same time, the regime used the assassination attempt strategically to settle its scores once and for all with the old elites. In order to try the conspirators, both civilian and military, in a civil court, Hitler ordered the heads of the Wehrmacht to give the conspirators a dishonourable discharge from the

³ Bombenattentat der Gruppe um Oberst von Stauffenberg auf Hitler am 20. Juli 1944 scheitert, *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB), 21.07.1944; Adolf Hitlers Ansprache an das deutsche Volk. Die Hintergründe des Mordplans. Kleine Generalsclique als Handlanger des Feindes, VB, 22.07.1944; Rede des Gauleiters von Berlin Dr Joseph Goebbels, VB, 27.07.1944; Todesurteile gegen die Männer vom 20. Juli 1944, VB, 09.08.1944; Das Volk hat sie gerichtet, VB, 09.08.1944.

⁴ Münchner Neueste Nachrichten, 22/23 Juli 1944.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stephan Malinowski, Es war kein Aufstand des Adels, *Cicero – Magazin für politische Kultur*, 01.07.2004.

army. In a process presided over by Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt and assisted by Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel and Colonel-General Heinz Guderian, twenty-two officers – out of which ten were noblemen – were expelled from the army and thus deprived of their right to be court-martialled on 4 August 1944.⁷ Consequently, the Volksgerichtshof, set up specifically in 1934 to handle crimes committed against the state, assumed responsibility for the conspirators.⁸ Its president, Roland Freisler, a ruthless National Socialist, was expressly instructed by Hitler to ensure the plotters would “be hung, [and] strung up like cattle in the slaughterhouse”.⁹

Very few of the conspirators tried to deny their involvement in the plot. Some, such as Tresckow and Plettenberg, committed suicide, while Hardenberg attempted suicide, in order to avoid giving away the names of others under torture. Yet the large majority, certain among them still naively believing in a fair trial, accepted their capture not only to protect their families, but also to bear witness before the general public.¹⁰ They hoped to use the Volksgerichtshof as a stage for a final concerted effort to expose the criminality of the regime. As a result, these representatives of the old elites

⁷ Gerd R. Ueberschär, Der “Ehrenhof” nach dem Attentat auf Hitler vom 20. Juli 1944, in: Bengt von zur Mühlen und Andreas von Klewitz (eds), *Die Angeklagten des 20. Juli vor dem Volksgerichtshof* (Berlin, 2001), p. 23; For a detailed list of the officers expelled see: Amtliche Mitteilung über die Ausstoßung von Offizieren aus dem Heer, 4. August 1944, in: Herbert Michaelis und Ernst Schraeppler (eds), *Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart. Eine Urkunden- und Dokumentensammlung zur Zeitgeschichte*, Volume 21 (Berlin, 1985), pp. 471, 472.

⁸ Joachim Fest, *Staatsstreich – Der lange Weg zum 20. Juli* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 298–299.

⁹ Dieter Ehlers, *Technik und Moral einer Verschwörung. 20. Juli 1944* (Frankfurt a. M., 1969), p. 113.

¹⁰ Aufgehängt wie Schlachtvieh, Joachim Fest über den Rachefeldzug des Nazi-Regimes gegen die Männer, die Hitler beseitigen wollten, *SPIEGEL*, 11.07.1994.

inevitably – yet unconsciously – contributed to the ‘nobiliarisation’ of the resistance by accepting their fate and acting as witnesses to the plot. The regime passed judgement on many of the grand old names of Prussia, including Moltke, Witzleben, Dohna, Lehndorff and Yorck von Wartenburg, thereby inexorably connecting the remembrance of the plot with the feudal elites of East Elbia.

The willingness of the nobility among the conspirators to openly declare their allegiance to the plot against Hitler reflected the habitus of a marginalised social group who considered demonstrative behaviour of this kind as a means of reasserting its etiolated corporate identity. Though the plot was driven by the desire to put an end to the annihilation of the Jewish people, stop the war crimes in the East, and prevent the complete downfall of the Reich¹¹, for many members of the traditional elite – and this becomes especially apparent in their behaviour during the collapse of the plot – it was also a final attempt to preserve the remnants of a corporative state (*Ständestaat*) and thereby maintain, if not regain, their pre-eminence. Along these lines, Martin Broszat has argued that “similar to the fanatic, self-sacrificing resistance-activism of the communists at the beginning of the Third Reich, the [nobility’s involvement in the] conservative conspiracy towards the end of the Third Reich stemmed from their socio-political outsider position, accompanied by various self-deceptions about their own role, as well as misjudgements of realistic chances, inspired by illusionary

¹¹ See: Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Auf dem Weg zum 20. Juli 1944, Motive und Entwicklung der Militäropposition gegen Hitler*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B27/2004), pp. 20, 21.

utopian dreams or by an excess of passionate hatred, and also nurtured by disappointments and the wounded dignity of a social class".¹²

By the autumn of 1944, the regime had begun to grasp the real magnitude of the conspiracy. Contrary to early expectations, the conspiracy proved to be a widespread and complexly layered phenomenon that incorporated representatives of almost all parts of society. The realisation that the coup had not only been the work of a small, conservative and military clique, but rather, that it had also been supported by representatives of the unions, the labour force and the churches, among others, caused widespread concern among the Nazi elite. In the wake of the attempted coup, Hitler had envisaged a public show trial, believing that widespread media coverage would ensure that his message of revenge was sent to the far corners of the Reich.¹³ Under the influence of Himmler, however, who seemed to more accurately grasp the possibly dangerous impact of show trials on popular opinion¹⁴, Hitler decided to exclude the public. "You are right, Himmler, if I stage a public show trial, I am forced to let them speak publicly. Maybe one of them will speak well and present himself as a 'peace bringer'. That could become dangerous."¹⁵ Soon after the first trials had begun, these fears proved

¹² Martin Broszat, *Zur Sozialgeschichte des deutschen Widerstands*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 34:3 (1986), p. 308.

¹³ Eberhard Zeller, *Der Geist der Freiheit, Der zwanzigste Juli* (Munich, 1957), p. 304.

¹⁴ More cautious circles within the regime feared that a public humiliation of various former high representatives of the Reich, such as Witzleben, Goerdeler, etc., might actually lead to a swing in opinion and raise questions as to why such prolific individuals had all of a sudden turned into enemies of the state. A public debate along these lines, it was feared, might be very difficult to control.

¹⁵ Helmut Ortner, *Der Hinrichter: Roland Freisler, Mörder im Dienste Hitlers* (Vienna, 1993), p. 235; Gert Buchheit, *Richter in roter Robe – Freisler – Präsident des Volksgerichtshofes* (Munich, 1968), p. 126.

to have been well-founded. Kaltenbrunner's¹⁶ daily reports regarding popular opinion suggested that the "cheap manner" in which Freisler berated and ridiculed the defendants was perceived as failing to meet the standards of Germany's highest court of justice. Many citizens, especially "members of the intelligentsia", were appalled by his conduct, which reminded them of "earlier Soviet show trials".¹⁷

It gradually dawned on the leadership that their ruthless reaction to the coup, and their concerted propaganda campaign against the old elites, might backfire. An opinion poll conducted by the SS Security Service suggested that, "the speech¹⁸ of Dr Ley was widely met with sharp rejection. The [regime's] categorical assault on the nobility in general is perceived to be dangerous for the unity of the German people".¹⁹ Following these developments, the Reich ministry of Propaganda even felt obliged to issue guidelines about how party officials were to deal with the old elites' involvement in the coup. It advised cadres to speak of "a camarilla of treacherous elements", driven by a conceited 'caste spirit' that had long been making a concerted effort to block promotions of National Socialist soldiers into the officer corps of the Wehrmacht. However "under no circumstances",

¹⁶ Ernst Kaltenbrunner was the head of the Reich Security Main Office and in charge of the persecution of the conspirators. His daily communiqués about the trials and its implications for Bormann and Hitler became known as the "Kaltenbrunner Reports".

¹⁷ Ortner, *Der Hinrichter*, p. 246.

¹⁸ See footnote 6 of this chapter.

¹⁹ Stimmungs- und Meinungsbild, Sicherheitsdienst des RF-SS an den Gauleiter Osthannover, Otto Telschow, 21.07.1944, in: Jacobsen (ed.), *Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung*, p. 609.

the guidelines warned, “should speakers succumb to the temptation to rail against the nobility in general”.²⁰

Deeply afraid of losing control over public debate and of a possible swing in public opinion, the executions were not publically exploited anymore. The regime altered its approach entirely and was working to obliterate the coup and its protagonists from public life and memory. Their relatives had been sent to jail, and their children force-transferred to orphanages to deprive them of their identity and remove them from society.²¹ Himmler had even suggested, inspired by old Germanic custom, exterminating the entire Stauffenberg family.²²

Allied Popular Reaction to the Coup

In the first instance, the Allies largely reinforced the regime's reading of what had transpired. The reaction of the Allies to 20 July 1944 was unambiguous. Two days after the failed coup, the conspirators were denounced as “an underground of Junkers”²³ that had “attempt[ed] to replace the swastika with the jack-boot”.²⁴ The *New York Times* spoke of the conspirators as “merely another brand of champions of militarism who merely believe

²⁰ Informationsbericht Nr. 3, Ereignisse des 20. Juli 1944, Reichspropagandaamt Osthannover, in: Jacobsen (ed.), *Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung*, p. 625.

²¹ *Die Frauen des 20. Juli 1944 – Die Schicksale der Attentäter Familien*, ZDF, 19.07.2013; Attentat vom 20. Juli 1944: Blutrache an den Kindern der Verschwörer, *SPIEGEL*, 13.07.2004.

²² Malinowski, Es war kein Aufstand des Adels, *Cicero*, 01.07.2004; Zeller, *Der Geist der Freiheit*, p. 299.

²³ The Revolt, *Manchester Guardian*, 22.07.1944.

²⁴ Patricia Meehan, *The Unnecessary War – Whitehall and the German Resistance to Hitler* (London, 1992), p. 336.

themselves better able to rescue the Reich from disaster than the present Nazi leaders".²⁵ The *Herald Tribune* claimed that Americans did not regret that Hitler survived and finished off his generals. America did not care about aristocrats, especially not about those who stabbed their leaders in the back.²⁶ "Let the general kill the corporal or vice-versa, preferably both."²⁷

The politicians followed suit. On 2 August 1944, Winston Churchill placed the conspirators on the same level as the Nazi rulers: "the highest personalities in the German Reich are murdering one another, or trying to, while the avenging armies of the Allies close upon the doomed and ever narrowing circle of their power".²⁸ These comments, in effect, conflated the conspirators with the Nazi regime, denying them the right to present the world with an alternative to Hitler; an alternative the Allies might not be able to control. In an internal communiqué, British Baron Oliver Harvey, Acting Assistant Secretary of State, formulated it more bluntly: "I am convinced that it was to our interest that the coup failed. If Hitler had died, we would have had a surge to make peace with the generals. The rot must proceed further yet. Our enemies are both the Nazis and the generals. We should make peace with neither".²⁹ Allied geopolitical strategy was focused on destroying Germany as a power base rather than on negotiating a settlement with its current government or any alternative formation.

²⁵ British Label Hitler Attack Rivals' Bid for False Peace, *New York Times*, 22.07.1944.

²⁶ Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler, An Appraisal* (Hinsdale, 1948), p. 160.

²⁷ International Swine, *New York Herald Tribune*, 09.08.1944.

²⁸ Charles Eade (ed.), *The War Speeches of the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill*, Volume 3 (London, 1964), p. 203.

²⁹ Baron Oliver Harvey, in: John Harvey (ed.), *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1941–1945* (London, 1978), p. 368.

By the summer of 1944, the aim of unconditional surrender had long been agreed upon.³⁰ Negotiations with a German opposition group, which ultimately sought a separate peace with the Western Allies, might have put fatal strains on relations with the Soviet Union. As early as 1942, British diplomat, Sir Geoffrey Harrison, reported that the British War Cabinet had already ordained that all rumours of a possible peace were to be ignored, partly so as not to arouse suspicions of 'our Russian allies'.³¹ Only months later, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Alexander Cadogan "reminded his colleagues of the doctrine that any resistance movement would have to seize power and carry out a convincing anti-Nazi purge before Britain would even negotiate with it".³² Thus the reaction of the Allies does not really come as a surprise. Such reluctance to support any kind of German resistance not only reduced the conspirators' chances, but also deterred them from acting swiftly, since it encouraged them to wait as long as possible to see whether the Wehrmacht might after all find a way to force any of the Allies into a military settlement.

The Allies' efforts to downplay the impact of the German resistance movement in the immediate aftermath of the coup ensured that there was little public acknowledgement of the movement in their respective countries after the war. In occupied Germany, as well, the Allies cast a veil of silence

³⁰ Donald E. Schmidt, *The Folly of War, American Foreign Policy, 1898–2005* (New York, 2005), pp. 189, 190; Also see: Franklin D. Roosevelt's, Address to the White House Correspondents' Association' on 12.02.1943, in which he laid out his plans for unconditional surrender, in: Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Volume 12 (1943), pp. 71–81.

³¹ Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War 1941–1947* (London, 1982), pp. 29, 30.

³² *Ibid*, p. 30.

over the existence of the military resistance. In their eyes, the men of 20 July 1944 had been too heavily entangled with the Third Reich to all of a sudden serve as role models for the re-founding of German democracy.³³ As displayed in the commentary of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *New York Times*, the Western Allies regarded the military resistance as opposition from the old elites, “an underground of Junkers”. This characterisation drew on stereotypes associated with the stigmatisation of ‘Prussianism’ from the First World War. At that time, Germany’s detour into authoritarianism, dictatorship and war was attributed to the country’s lopsided economic and social modernisation and their failure to dislodge a powerful traditional social elite who held a vested interest in military adventurism.³⁴ Incorporating these alleged traditional enemies of Germany’s path towards peace and democracy into a reformed and refined constitutional state was not on the western Allied agenda.

Furthermore, the Allies were concerned that any reference to the resistance might vindicate German claims that there existed a ‘better’ Germany opposed to the regime, and thus appear to diminish Germany’s culpability.³⁵ This fear proved to be unfounded. In the immediate aftermath of the war,

³³ Lothar Kettenacker, Die Haltung der Westalliierten gegenüber Hitlerattentat und Widerstand nach dem 20. Juli 1944, in: Gerd R. Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20. Juli, Das andere Deutschland in der Vergangenheitspolitik nach 1945* (Berlin, 1998), p. 29.

³⁴ See: A. Whitney Griswold, The Junkers: Hostages to the Past, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, University of Virginia, 19:3 (1943), online at: www.vqronline.org/essay/junkers-hostages-past; Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1966); Sydney L. W. Mellen, The German People and the Postwar World, in: *The American Political Science Review*, 37:4 (1943), pp. 601–625.

³⁵ Peter Steinbach, Widerstand im Dritten Reich – Die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie?, in: Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20. Juli, Das andere Deutschland*, p. 104.

German popular opinion remained sceptical vis-à-vis the military resistance and there were no signs that the public intended to exploit the attempted coup in order to exculpate itself. Far from relativising German culpability, the 20 July conspiracy confronted the majority of Germans with an inconvenient truth. As Peter Steinbach has pointed out, the action taken by the conspirators revealed that obedience as a consequence of fear and terror could no longer suffice to explain compliance with the regime's criminal objectives.³⁶ The argument that resistance was impossible was powerfully invalidated.³⁷ This, in turn, had the perverse consequence of rendering many Germans embarrassed by the bravery of the resisters.³⁸

First Literary Accounts

By the summer of 1945, the memory of the military resistance had been strategically suppressed. Although the regime had originally focused its outrage on the old elites, and specifically the nobility, the propaganda campaign against the July Plot was soon wound down in order to avoid stimulating critical speculation about the reasons and motives of the conspirators. The Allies proceeded in a similar fashion. After initially condemning the plot for geopolitical concerns, the western governments downplayed the resistance so as not to offer the Germans a favourable

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jörg Hillmann, *Der 20 Juli und die Marine, Ein Beitrag zu Ereignis und Rezeption* (Bochum, 2004), p. 9.

³⁸ Peter Steinbach, *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus und der 20. Juli 1944*, in: Ernst Luuk (ed.), *Der 20. Juli 1944, Reden zu einem Tag der deutschen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1984), p. 26.

platform from which to stage a belittlement of their collective guilt. The US-government even issued a directive from the president, antedating the cessation of hostilities in the European Theatre of War, stating “there is to be no mention in print of the German Resistance”. Even after the cessation of hostilities, the American occupation authorities continued to enforce the ban on such publications.³⁹

Nevertheless, by such time, the perception that the nobility had largely been responsible for 20 July had already anchored itself in public memory. The anti-noble tirades of the regime that followed the uncovering of the plot and the concentration of old noble names among the conspirators had inculcated the belief. This perception was further reinforced by the prominent role members of the famous Infantry Regiment 9 (IR 9) had played in the coup. The IR 9 was the successor regiment of the Prussian 1st Foot Guard Regiment, which had once considered itself the “noblest regiment of Christendom”.⁴⁰ Ever since its formation in 1806, the officer corps of the regiment had comprised predominantly of members of the old nobility. This tradition was largely maintained in the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht. Although the proportion of nobility in the ranks was declining, it still

³⁹ Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance against Hitler, The Search for Allies Abroad, 1938–1945* (Oxford, 1992), p. 386; See also: Louis Lochner, *Always the Unexpected: A Book of Reminiscences* (New York, 1956), p. 294; Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (New York, 1973), p. 716.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Paul, *Das Potsdamer Infanterie Regiment 9, 1918–1945 Preußische Tradition in Krieg und Frieden* (Osnabrück, 1985), p. IX, See also: Friedrich von Friedeburg und Gustav von Waldersee, *Geschichte des Königlich Preußischen Ersten Garde-Regiments zu Fuß. 1871–1914* (Potsdam, 1933); *Chronik des Ersten Garde-Regiments zu Fuß und dessen Stamm-Truppen 1675–1900* (Berlin, 1902).

amounted to 47 per cent in 1933,⁴¹ and the regiment was popularly known as “Count Nine’s Regiment” (Regiment Graf 9).⁴² In all, twenty officers of IR 9 – of whom seventeen were noblemen – were involved in the July 1944 conspiracy.⁴³ The Hitler regime responded by dissolving the regiment and incorporating it into the Infantry Regiment 67. It was assumed that the regiment would “vanish into thin air”.⁴⁴

The view that the attempt on Hitler’s life was the work of traitorous elements of a decadent and outmoded elite was initially widely propagated. However, this consensus would soon to be challenged. Shortly after the war, competing concepts emerged, all attempting to use the commemoration of 20 July to construct a narrative that would allow Germany to re-establish itself as a viable and integral partner of the western community of states. The intention was to portray the conspiracy as a movement deeply rooted in all parts of German society, and thereby, build a bridge between the values of

⁴¹ In 1920, 62 per cent of the regiment’s officers were noblemen. By 1933, this number had fallen to 47 per cent. See: Markus Funck, *Der preußische Militäradel in der Weimarer Republik*, in: Heinz Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II, Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2001), p. 163.

⁴² Ines Reich, *Potsdam und der 20. Juli 1944. Auf den Spuren des Widerstandes gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Freiburg, 1994), p. 30; also see: Ines Reich, Graf Neun und der 20. Juli 1944, in: Sigrid Grabner und Knut Kiesant (eds), *1000 Jahre Potsdam. Das Buch zum Stadtjubiläum mit dem Festprogramm* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 190–192.

⁴³ See: Paul, *Das Potsdamer Infanterie Regiment 9*, pp. 544–551; Kurt Finker, *Das Potsdamer Infanterieregiment 9 und der konservative militärische Widerstand*, in: Bernhard R. Kroener (ed.), *Potsdam. Staat, Armee, Residenz in der preußisch-deutschen Militärgeschichte* (Berlin, 1993), p. 454.

⁴⁴ Ekkehard Klaus, *Preussische Soldatentradition und Widerstand – Das Potsdamer Infanterieregiment 9 zwischen dem Tag von Potsdam und dem 20. Juli 1944*, in: Jürgen Schmädke und Peter Steinbach (eds), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Die deutsche Gesellschaft und der Widerstand gegen Hitler* (Munich, 1985), p. 541.

Stauffenberg's 'other Germany' and a new, western-oriented German democracy.

The key figure in this process was Allen W. Dulles, the head of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in Switzerland, who was later to become director of the CIA. During the war, Switzerland had been the pivot of clandestine operations. With the help of his German-born assistant, Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz, Dulles had been in regular contact with numerous members of the military resistance who had repeatedly tried to secure an undertaking from the Western Allies that they would support a successful plot. Constrained by the Allies' rigid policy of attaining unconditional surrender, Dulles was unable to offer substantial assistance to the conspirators. However, in the months following the failed coup, he came to understand that the conspiracy had actually been much more widespread and substantial than he had initially envisaged. At the same time, the establishment of the Moscow funded *Lublin Committee* and the growing influence of the *National Committee for a Free Germany* stirred suspicion as to Stalin's plans for post-war Europe.⁴⁵ The complete annihilation by the Gestapo of the military resistance, whom had favoured an association with the Western Allies, led to growing concerns within the OSS about future American influence on Germany in the event of a growing post-war estrangement between the West and the Soviet Union. Hans Bernd Gisevius, a former member of the Gestapo and surviving conspirator, reaffirmed this view in his report to the OSS, which was smuggled out of Berlin in January

⁴⁵ See: Heike Bungert, *Das Nationalkomitee und der Westen: Die Reaktion der Westalliierten auf das NKFD und die Freien Deutschen Bewegungen 1943–1948* (Stuttgart, 1997), pp. 158, 159.

1945, stating that if the US “go into Germany without any plans [...] something like the Seydlitz committee will eventually be imposed on them”.⁴⁶ From there on, Dulles and Gaevernitz were convinced that the battle for the hearts and minds of the Germans had begun. They no longer believed in a permanent alliance of the Allies, and wanted to ensure, in case the Soviet Union were to become the main enemy, that Germany would be ideologically aligned with the West rather than the East.⁴⁷

In order to align what remained of the resisting networks with the west, and to prevent their drifting into the orbit of the Soviet Union, the Americans took steps towards a rehabilitation of the circles close to Stauffenberg. By allowing the narrative to surface that “it had been Germans within the Reich who attempted to free the world from Hitler” Dulles and Gaevernitz hoped to establish a positive and lasting memory of the military resistance and offer the Germans an example to identify with; an example which might provide “hope for Germany”.⁴⁸ Only against this background can one make sense of Dulles’ and Gaevernitz’ attempts, in the summer of 1945, to gather as many reports and statements from survivors as possible, and to assist with their publication.⁴⁹ Gaevernitz, himself a Silesian nobleman, therefore travelled to

⁴⁶ Telegram from Allen W. Dulles (OSS Bern) to OSS Washington: How should the United States React to the Russian Free German Committee, 05.02.1945, in: Jürgen Heideking and Christof Mauch (eds), *American Intelligence and the German Resistance to Hitler, A Documentary History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 376.

⁴⁷ Jürgen Heideking, Politisches Kalkül und Menschlichkeit: Allen W. Dulles, Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz und der deutsche Widerstand nach dem 20. Juli 1944, in: Michael Wala und Reinhard Doerries (eds), *Gesellschaft und Diplomatie im transatlantischen Kontext* (Stuttgart, 1999), p. 238.

⁴⁸ Allen W. Dulles, *Verschwörung in Deutschland* (Zürich, 1948), p. 235.

⁴⁹ Heideking, Politisches Kalkül und Menschlichkeit, in: Wala und Doerries (eds), *Gesellschaft und Diplomatie*, p. 238.

Kreisau, the family estate of the von Moltkes in Silesia, to take charge of the hidden correspondence of Freya von Moltke and her husband Helmuth James, a leading member of the Kreisau Circle.⁵⁰ This correspondence later formed the basis of Freya's book – *Letters to Freya 1939-1945* – regarding her husband's involvement in the resistance.⁵¹ Gaevernitz also met with widows of other leading noble members of the Kreisau Circle to gather information about their husbands' role in the July conspiracy. Among them were Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, and Clarita von Trott zu Solz, the widow of Gaevernitz's long-time friend, Adam von Trott zu Solz, who had continuously fed information about the activities of the Kreisau Circle to the OSS throughout the war.⁵²

Gaevernitz also encouraged Hans Bernd Gisevius to set out his views of the plot in a major literary account, published in two volumes in 1946, under the title *To the Bitter End*.⁵³ Gisevius, who had continuously informed the OSS of the intentions of the military resistance from the very beginning of the war, had already left Germany for Switzerland with the assistance of the OSS in

⁵⁰ The Kreisau circle was a group of dissidents circled around Helmuth James Graf von Moltke and was named after the Moltke family estate, Kreisau, in Silesia where the group held its meetings. See: Freya Gräfin von Moltke, *Erinnerungen an Kreisau, 1930–1945* (Munich, 1997); Ger van Roon, *German resistance to Hitler: Count von Moltke and the Kreisau Circle* (London, 1971).

⁵¹ Encouraged by the work of her friend, Annedore Leber, who published a book about her husband's involvement in the resistance in 1956 under the title *Das Gewissen steht auf*, Freya von Moltke also began to give lectures in West German schools to preserve the memory of the men of 20 July 1944. See: Frauke Geyken, *Freya von Moltke. Ein Jahrhundertleben 1911–2010* (Munich, 2011), p. 169.

⁵² Geyken, *Freya von Moltke*, p. 169; Freya von Moltke, *Memories of Kreisau and the German Resistance* (Lincoln, 2003), pp. 65, 66; Clarita von Trott zu Solz, *Adam von Trott zu Solz – Eine Lebensbeschreibung* (Berlin, 1994), p. 184.

⁵³ Hans Bernd Gisevius, *Bis zum bitteren Ende*, 2 Volumes (Zürich, 1946).

January 1945. Due to an Allied print prohibition in Germany, Gaevernitz organised its publication in Zürich.⁵⁴

Gaevernitz also approached Fabian von Schlabrendorff, one of the key figures of the military branch of the conspiracy. Born into an old noble family in 1907, Schlabrendorff studied law and went on to become the assistant of Herbert von Bismarck, permanent secretary in the Prussian Home Office. Both men had been resolute opponents of the Nazi regime from an early age. In 1941, Schlabrendorff became the adjutant of Colonel Henning von Tresckow, who was his cousin and mastermind of the military resistance.⁵⁵ Over the following years, he was involved in numerous attempts to kill Hitler. Following the failed coup in July 1944, Schlabrendorff was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Berlin. Yet despite severe and protracted torture, he did not reveal the names of fellow co-conspirators. Although formally acquitted in March 1945, Schlabrendorff remained in various concentration camps until the end of the war. As part of a convoy of prominent political prisoners, he was finally liberated in northern Italy just before the end of the war.⁵⁶ It was there that Gaevernitz approached and induced him to write down his experiences as an actor in the July conspiracy.

⁵⁴ Christiane Toyka-Seid, *Der Widerstand gegen Hitler und die westdeutsche Gesellschaft: Anmerkungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des "anderen Deutschland" in den frühen Nachkriegsjahren*, in: Peter Steinbach und Johannes Tuchel (eds), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1994), p. 579; Astrid M. Eckert, "Mit Stolz blicken die Deutschen auf die Männer des 20. Juli..." Ein unbekannter Artikel Emil Dovifats über das Attentat auf Hitler, in: Bernd Sösemann (ed.) *Emil Dovifat – Studien und Dokumente zu Leben und Werk* (Berlin, 1998), p. 181.

⁵⁵ Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (Berlin, 1984), p. 9, 41.

⁵⁶ Volker Koop, *In Hitler's Hand – Sonder- und Ehrenhäftlinge der SS* (Cologne, 2010), pp. 225–230; Sigismund Payne Best, *The Venlo Incident* (London, 1950), pp. 256–265; See also Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, pp. 154–157.

Offiziere gegen Hitler was also published in Zürich in 1946. Building on this body of information, Gaevernitz and Dulles eventually published their own account of the events of 20 July in 1948 in which they meticulously laid out the plans of the July conspirators and attempted to solidify the view that despite the ascendancy of Nazism and the criminality of the regime, morally righteous forces in Germany had never entirely vanished.⁵⁷

In short, the literary rehabilitation of the military resistance, and its elaboration into a foundation myth, began as part of a plan by the head of the OSS to facilitate the ideological integration of Germany into the western world. The early commemoration of the conspiracy was influenced more by strategic than moral and humanitarian motives. Thanks to the contacts provided by Gero von Schulze Gaevernitz, noblemen and -women played a crucial role in the early post-war management of the memory and reputation of the anti-Hitler resistance.

This is not to say that the early authors, although encouraged and assisted by the OSS, did not have their own axes to grind. As a staff officer of Army Group Centre, Schlabrendorff directed his focus towards the officers involved in the plot. In this way, he unintentionally supported the widely accepted notion, domestically and abroad, that the coup had been the work of a small group of Wehrmacht officers, motivated by their horror at the regime's war crimes in the East. A detailed portrayal of the various social and ideological facets of the conspiracy movement is not described in his book. Gisevius, for his part, was eager to portray himself as one of the key

⁵⁷ Dulles, *Verschwörung in Deutschland*, p. 275.

members of the conspiracy, and significantly enhanced his personal involvement.⁵⁸ Because of his early engagement in the Gestapo, various leading figures of the conspiracy remained suspicious of Gisevius, denying him access to privileged information about the planning of the assassination.⁵⁹

Also of note were the diaries of Ulrich von Hassel, the former German ambassador to Rome. Regarded by many as one of the most able diplomats of the Third Reich, and highly respected domestically, as well as abroad, Hassel was designated to become Foreign Minister in the event of the coup proving successful. Although deeply involved in the conspiracy from the very beginning, he continued to render services to the regime. His diaries are written from the viewpoint of a diplomat, closely aligned to the civil service, the generals and the intellectual elite of Germany. The resistance, as described by Hassell – himself the descendant of an old Pomeranian noble family – is a movement driven by the old elites; ‘ordinary people’ of the lower orders make no appearance. Nevertheless, his account shed light on the inner structure of the conspiratorial networks and thereby became a key document in the history of the resistance. Yet a clear assessment of his intentions was impeded by the fact that his wife edited the diaries prior to

⁵⁸ See also Rudolf Pechel’s comment about Gisevius: “His book found worldwide publication and he managed to be celebrated as one of the last prominent survivors of 20 July. This caused outrage among the few surviving members of the conspiracy who resolutely reject Gisevius.” Rudolf Pechel, *Deutscher Widerstand* (Zürich, 1947), p. 251.

⁵⁹ Sigmund Schultze, *Die Deutsche Widerstandsbewegung im Spiegel der Ausländischen Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1948), pp. 22–23; Ulrich von Hassel, *Vom Andern Deutschland* (Zürich, 1947), p. 367.

their publication in Zürich in 1947 to prevent any sort of misinterpretation, which might have linked her husband too closely to the Nazi regime.⁶⁰

Similarly, influential was Rudolf Pechel's book *Deutscher Widerstand*. Pechel did not play an active role in the plot. As editor in chief of the *Deutsche Rundschau* he had attacked the Nazi regime right from the outset. By using historical figures, comparisons and quotations to subtly attack and ridicule the excesses of the Nazi regime, he gradually perfected his camouflaged critique of the Third Reich. A story published January 1942 attacking Joseph Goebbels was the last straw, and the regime had him arrested. Although he was interned in various concentration camps, it was not until the events of 20 July 1944 that Pechel was finally brought before a court. Although the Gestapo was aware of his connections to Carl Goerdeler, the link did not constitute proof of Pechel's connivance.⁶¹ His account of the events was published in Zürich in 1947 and, unlike the others, proved to be much more detailed, avoiding focus on any single subgroup of the conspiracy. Pechel vividly portrayed the involvement of the officers, the communists, the Red Orchestra, the White Rose, and the Kreisau Circle, as well as the struggle of the churches, thereby providing the first comprehensive overview of the diversity of the German resistance. He also openly attacked the Allies for their inactivity and their failure to strategically support the various German resistance groups. Along the lines of Goerdeler's attempts during his interrogations, Pechel tried to portray the German resistance as a movement of the people, firmly anchored in all parts of society. As a result of this and

⁶⁰ Widerstand ohne Wenn und Aber, *Die Zeit*, 24.03.1989.

⁶¹ Bücher zum deutschen Widerstand, *SPIEGEL*, 11.09.1947.

other accounts, the initially strong noble connotations of the coup began to fade. The noble dimension was not denied, but it appeared less dominant in accounts that emphasised the social diversity of the plot.

A few years later, the first academic accounts of the German resistance were published. Among them were the influential works *The German Opposition to Hitler* by Hans Rothfels and *Carl Goerdeler und die Deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* by Gerhard Ritter. Both works pursued the same objective, and were firmly anchored in national and right-liberal convictions, and before the war, both authors had shared the same doctoral supervisor. Rothfels admired the supra national, self-regulatory and neo-conservative principles of the Kreisau Circle. Soon after the war, Rothfels and Ritter reassured each other of their political convictions in an extended correspondence in which they also informed each other of their desire to publish works about the German resistance movement.⁶²

The fundamental idea of their works was to counter the prevailing Allied critique that National Socialism had inevitably resulted from disastrous German traditions such as blind obedience and militarism. They fought for the acknowledgement of the resistance's "moral self-assertion" during the darkest hour of German history and thereby intended to build bridges to a new democratic society.⁶³ Hence Ritter portrayed National Socialism not as a German creation, but rather the German variant of a European phenomenon;

⁶² Christoph Cornelißen, Hans Rothfels, Gerhard Ritter und die Rezeption des 20. Juli 1944, in: Johannes Hürter und Hans Woller (eds), *Hans Rothfels und die Deutsche Zeitgeschichte* (Munich, 2005), pp. 101–103.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 109.

“a crisis of liberal society and the system of government”.⁶⁴ Whether he intended to or not, Ritter, in a sense, came to the rescue of the nobility – the pre-eminent traditional elite whose connivance in National Socialism was seen as crucial to the failure of democracy – by pinning Germany’s culpability on liberal bourgeois society, rather than on the ‘old elites’ and their corporate malformations.

Rothfels argued that large parts of German society had remained immune to National Socialism and that the majority of the population had never identified with the sort of anti-Semitism the Nazis propagated.⁶⁵ The underlying objective of both works, as Christoph Cornelißen has pointed out, was to transform the motives and convictions of the 20 July conspirators into the “constitutive elements of [a new] system of government”, of a newly founded democratic Germany.⁶⁶ Ultimately, one must regard both books as strategic attempts at a conservative policy of self-exculpation, aiming both to establish the resistance as a foundational myth and to counter the concept of German collective guilt by insisting on the non-collusion of the greater part of society. There was a marked convergence in this respect with the perspectives of Allen W. Dulles and the OSS.

Allied print censorship meant that all these early literary appraisals of the German resistance movement had to be published abroad. Yet the media were not systematically prevented from covering the subject. A ban on media

⁶⁴ Gerhard Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 94.

⁶⁵ Hans Rothfels, *Deutsche Opposition gegen Hitler* (Frankfurt a. M., 1978), pp. 38–55.

⁶⁶ Christoph Cornelißen, *Gerhard Ritter – Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001), p. 560.

coverage was not necessary, since the unpopularity of the coup largely discouraged editors and journalists from covering the topic.⁶⁷ In the immediate post-war years, we find very few articles honouring the motives and achievements of the conspirators in the German press. There were, however, sporadic pieces on the “freedom fighters against Hitler”, “the reasons why the conspirators failed” and “Christian reflections on tyrannicide”, especially around the time of the anniversary of the plot.⁶⁸

The Hamburg based newspaper *Die Zeit* took a leading role in this process and devoted itself to the commemoration of the military resistance. This engagement was mainly driven by its deputy editor in chief, Ernst Friedländer, a German émigré to Liechtenstein during the Third Reich, and the aspiring young journalist Marion Countess Dönhoff. Friedländer, a staunch proponent of European integration, was convinced of the idea that pacification of Germany could only be achieved by means of reintegration. As a prerequisite, he claimed, it was vital that the world recognised “that

⁶⁷ At the beginning of the 1950s, more than 50 percent of the German population were convinced that National Socialism had in itself been a good, yet badly executed concept. See: Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany. The OMGUS Surveys* (Urbana, 1970), p. 33; By 1951, 30 percent still strongly disapproved of the assassination attempt on ‘their Führer’, with another 40 percent unwilling to give their opinion. See: Erich-Peter Neumann and Elisabeth Noelle, *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947–1955* (Allensbach, 1957), p. 138; By 1956, 49 percent still refused to name a school after members of the plot. Erich-Peter Neumann and Elisabeth Noelle, *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1957* (Allensbach, 1957), p. 145.

⁶⁸ *Freiheitskämpfer gegen Hitler*, *Die Zeit*, 22.07.1948; *Ein Kilo Dynamit zu wenig – 20 Juli 1944*, *Die Tragödie der deutschen Widerstandsbewegung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19.07.1949; *Das Opfer ist Schuld*, *Die Zeit*, 23.07.1953; *Das Attentat*, *Die Zeit*, 18.07.1946.

there had been people in Nazi-Germany who were willing to sacrifice everything to atone for German guilt”.⁶⁹

Marion Dönhoff, offspring of one of the major noble families of East Prussia, had been close friends with several of the conspirators. From the summer of 1945, she had vividly fought for the remembrance of these men. In July 1946, she published her first extended article *Das heimliche Deutschland der Männer des 20. Juli* in which she hailed “the best men of all parts of society [...] who risked their lives to free Germany from the gang of criminals that ruled the Reich”.⁷⁰ Over the following years, Dönhoff published numerous articles to fight the odium of treason that still surrounded the memory of the resistance movement, and thereby undoubtedly became the most prominent post-war proponent of the military resistance.⁷¹ The *Zeit* thus joined Dulles, Rothfels, Ritter and other like-minded publicists in their attempts to establish the July conspiracy as a point of departure for Germany’s return into the community of civilised nations. Operating from her platform in *Die Zeit*, Dönhoff would later play a crucial role in re-nobiliarising the resistance and in refurbishing the collective reputation of the post-war nobility – I return to this theme in Chapter Two.

Ultimately, it can be determined that most early literary appraisals of the German resistance movement were the work of people who had, at least to a degree, been personally involved in the resistance. Although initiated and

⁶⁹ Zum 20 Juli – Helden und Dulder, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1947.

⁷⁰ Das heimliche Deutschland der Männer des 20. Juli, *Die Zeit*, 18.07.1946.

⁷¹ See some of Dönhoff’s early post-war articles: Auflehnung gegen den Helden, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1952; Das Gewissen steht auf, *Die Zeit*, 15.07.1954.

significantly encouraged by Allen Dulles and Gero von Schultze Gaevernitz to speak out, the various authors quickly made use of this platform to promote their own agendas and convey personally favourable narratives of the resistance movement. By the beginning of the 1950s – considerably aided by noble writers – the military resistance was increasingly entrenched in German public memory. The prerogative of interpretation had not yet been successfully claimed by any of its protagonists, but the process was well under way.

Early Pressure Groups

In addition to publishing literary accounts, the surviving representatives of the military resistance worked through pressure groups whose purpose was to establish its moral status and to work towards its commemoration. Shortly after the war, Carl-Hans Count von Hardenberg, his wife Renate, and Fabian von Schlabrendorff, among others, set up the Hilfswerk 20 Juli, which initially intended to provide moral support and financial assistance to survivors of the 20 July 1944 plot and their relatives.⁷² Marion Countess Dönhoff joined as deputy member of the board of trustees soon after, thereby turning the foundation into a heavily noble-dominated affair.⁷³ As the name suggests, the founding members had a clear understanding of whom should be included and benefit from the work of the foundation; namely, only

⁷² Geschichte: Gründung und Nachkriegsjahre, Stiftung 20. Juli 1944, online at: www.stiftung-20-juli-1944.de/stiftung-20-juli-1944/geschichte/.

⁷³ Hereto see footnote 26 in: Eckart Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels – Marion Gräfin Dönhoff und das Bild des Widerstands gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 51:4 (2003), p. 490.

people “who had been directly, consciously and actively involved in those German resistive activities which were responsible for the assassination attempt and coup of 20 July”.⁷⁴ In doing so, those responsible inevitably identified the members of the July conspiracy, most of them noblemen, as the first and foremost representatives of German resistance.

Shortly after its foundation, various members formed a sub-committee and demanded that the Hilfswerk be transformed from a charitable foundation into a strategic pressure group, designed to preserve and cultivate the historical heritage of the conspirators.⁷⁵ To these ends, they not only demanded the establishment of a state funded research centre, but also intended to compile “a historically true work about the preparations that lead to 20 July”.⁷⁶ The sub-committee argued: “In light of the severe misperception of the German resistance movement in the German and foreign press and in light of the many erroneous or factitious reports that circulate about the German resistance movement, it is necessary to gather and screen all authentic material that relates to the activities of 20 July 1944 as soon as possible”.⁷⁷ Consequently, the Hilfswerk commissioned the historian Gerhard Ritter to write a comprehensive history of the military

⁷⁴ Fabian von Schlabrendorff an Renate Gräfin von Hardenberg, 11.11.47 in: BA Koblenz, B 106/32005, cited in: Christiane Toyka-Seid, *Gralshüter, Notgemeinschaft oder gesellschaftliche Pressure Group? Die Stiftung Hilfswerk 20. Juli 1944 im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzent*, in: Gerd R. Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20. Juli 1944, Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994), p. 199.

⁷⁵ See: Denkschrift der Arbeitsgemeinschaft 20. Juli vom 27.01.1950, cited in: Toyka-Seid, *Gralshüter, Notgemeinschaft oder gesellschaftliche Pressure Group?*, p. 200.

⁷⁶ Entwurf eines Rundschreibens vom 17/18 Juli 1947. In BAK, NL Ritter, 491, cited in: Christiane Toyka-Seid, *Der Widerstand gegen Hitler und die westdeutsche Gesellschaft*, p. 577.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 576.

resistance. It was intended that he should produce a history that would portray the conspirators as models of moral integrity, honour and duty; answerable only to their conscience, and willing to die in order to redeem the German nation. Ritter, however, soon withdrew from the project. He did not want to get entangled in a moral judgement of the coup. Countess Hardenberg, the head of the Hilfswerk, had repeatedly demanded that the Kaltenbrunner reports – the daily transcripts of the interrogations prepared for Bormann and Hitler by the Reich Security Main Office – be excluded. She feared that these biased accounts of the Gestapo might distort and harm the carefully nurtured commemoration of the conspirators' motives and convictions.⁷⁸ Ritter, however, perceived this intervention as a "cover up" of historical evidence and regarded it "as not only intolerable from the standpoint of a scholar, but also as politically dangerous".⁷⁹

Furthermore, the Hilfswerk's sub-committee wished to be assigned with the official task of reviewing publications concerning the 20 July plot and assess their "eligibility as historic source material",⁸⁰ thereby trying to directly control and steer the remembrance of the conspiracy. Ultimately, all these actions were not only designed to ensure a lasting commemoration of the military resistance, but also to establish it as the primary and only "true" resistance movement in Nazi Germany.

⁷⁸ See also Marion Gräfin Dönhoff's attempts to prevent the publication of the Kaltenbrunner Reports in the early 1960s: Protest gegen eine Publikation, Die Kaltenbrunner-Berichte – Zum Thema verlegerischer Verantwortung, *Die Zeit*, 20.10.1961.

⁷⁹ Gerhard Ritter an Gräfin Hardenberg vom 22. Dezember 1954, in: BAK, NL Ritter, 492. Cited in: Toyka-Seid, *Widerstand gegen Hitler und die westdeutsche Gesellschaft*, p. 578.

⁸⁰ See: Protokoll der Tagung Hilfswerk 20. Juli 1944 in Hindelang am 17/18 August 1947, cited in: Toyka-Seid, *Gralshüter, Notgemeinschaft oder gesellschaftliche Pressure Group*, p. 168.

The influence of the Hilfswerk even extended beyond the borders of Germany. Encouraged by its work, Christabel Bielenberg set up the 20th July Memorial Fund in England to assist the relatives and survivors of the plot. Bielenberg had been a personal friend of Adam von Trott zu Solz, a member of the Foreign Office and leading participant of the resistance. The go-between was once again Marion Dönhoff, who put Bielenberg in touch with Hardenberg to synchronise their efforts in bringing relief to the victims and raise public awareness for the conspiracy at home and abroad.⁸¹ Bielenberg framed the resistance in a specific light by adopting the name 20th July Memorial Fund, a programmatic title, foregrounding the role played by the officers involved in the actual assassination attempt and putting them at the centre of the commemoration of German resistance. Bielenberg managed to convince George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, to become the Memorial Fund's patron and sign an appeal for donations for the survivors. It was launched in *The Times* and in the *Observer*, which at that time was owned by David Astor, a close friend of Dönhoff and Bielenberg.⁸² Bell was a highly influential and vocal figure in Britain. From early on in the war, he had publically called for distinguishing between Nazis and Germans and branded the two nations' policy of area bombing a "calamitous mistake".⁸³ He argued "it is barbarous to make unarmed women and children the deliberate object of attack" and therefore asked the British government in *The Times* to "refrain from night-bombing either all together or of towns with

⁸¹ Christabel Bielenberg, *The Road Ahead* (London, 1992), pp. 97–100.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁸³ Ronald C. D. Jasper, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester* (London, 1967), p. 262.

civilian populations”.⁸⁴ His friendship with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leading member of the Church resistance in Germany, had encouraged him to intervene repeatedly with the British authorities on behalf of the military resistance. After the failed coup, he urged Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to help surviving conspirators to escape Germany.⁸⁵

Another friend of Marion Dönhoff, Eric Warburg, helped to set up a similar fund in the United States, *The American Committee to Aid the Survivors of the German Resistance in the USA*. Born in Hamburg in 1900, the offspring of a famous German-Jewish banking dynasty had escaped to America in 1938 and returned as an American officer to interrogate high-ranking Nazis such as Hermann Goering.⁸⁶ The committee organized exchange programmes for children of conspirators and thereby intended to contribute to “building morale and helping to provide leadership for a democratic Germany”.⁸⁷ As a result, among others, Bernhard von Falkenhausen came to America, Klaus von Dohnanyi was sent to Yale University, and Benigna Goerdeler to Briarcliff College.⁸⁸ Yet, unlike the Hilfswerk and the Memorial Fund, the American Committee intended to grant aid to resistance fighters beyond the 20 July plot. Warburg explicitly stated that “the group who are to be assisted

⁸⁴ George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, The Pope’s Appeal, *The Times*, 17.04.1941.

⁸⁵ Jasper, *George Bell, Bishop of Chichester*, p. 281.

⁸⁶ Alfonso A. Narvaez, Obituary: Eric Warburg, 90, Investment Banker from Germany Dies, *New York Times*, 11.07.1990.

⁸⁷ Dulles, *Verschwörung in Deutschland*, p. 248.

⁸⁸ See the correspondence between Karl Adler from Briarcliff College and the Office for Military Government For Germany, 03.02.1947, in: Leo Baeck Institute Archives, Center for Jewish History (New York), Karl Adler Collection, AR 7276/MF 572; see also, the letter of the “American Committee to Aid Survivors of the German Resistance” to Karl Adler of Briarcliff College, in: Leo Baeck Institute Archives, Karl Adler Collection, AR 7276/MF 572.

in this way is not limited just to the survivors of the 20th of July 1944 but is to include those whose relations made their sacrifice years before”.⁸⁹ However “participants in the communist movement”, were excluded from American aid, and the main focus continued to remain on the 20 July conspiracy.⁹⁰ Freya von Moltke, the wife of former resistance fighter Helmuth Count von Moltke, rendered further support by giving a lecture series in the United States to promote the cause and motives of the resistance movement and raise money for the aid of its survivors.⁹¹

Thus, shortly after the war, key survivors of the military resistance came together to organize financial aid for the relatives of the conspirators and to frame and direct the commemoration of the conspiracy in such a way as to ensure that the 20 July plot emerged as Germany’s primary resistance movement. Although this heavily noble-dominated pressure group did not yet explicitly seek to ‘ennoble’ the military resistance, it did significantly contribute to the moral elevation of the resistance to a symbolic status, and thereby paved the way for the nobility’s future alignment with this morality. The go-between in this process was Marion Countess Dönhoff, whose friends, Eric Warburg, Christabel Bielenberg and David Astor, worked to promote the remembrance of 20 July in Britain and the United States. During times when the majority of the Allied public still regarded the military resistance as a reactionary gang of officers and Junkers, who had only acted

⁸⁹ Dulles, *Verschwörung in Deutschland*, p. 247.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Countess Freya von Moltke: a German of the Nazi Resistance, Promotional Brochure for lecture series, The University of Iowa Digital Library, online at: digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/tc/id/21076/rec/10.

to preserve their own privileges, such initiatives were crucial in rebuilding the reputation of Germany and its elite at home and abroad.

20 July 1944 in Court

Literary accounts and newspapers were two sources which shaped the interpretation of the resistance. Trials were another. The early 1950s saw a significant resurgence of nationalism and intensified public denigration of the military resistance. In this period in which control of the reputation of the resistance against Hitler was as yet not concentrated in any player's hands, and public opinion was divided, it fell to the courts to assess its legal and moral legitimacy.

In the immediate post-war years, the noble-dominated networks associated with the military resistance faced little competition from other bodies. However, this changed when Germany began to recover from the devastation of the war, and new opinion-shaping bodies emerged to contest the memory of the recent past. This was especially true in light of the rearmament debate that flared up after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. The deepening of East-West tensions raised the question of a German contribution to the defence of Western Europe against a possible Soviet attack. The increasing visibility and prominence of veterans'

groups raised once again the question of the military oath and focused public attention on the actions of the men of 20 July 1944.⁹²

The newly founded veteran organisations were especially hostile. Hans Frießner, chairman of the 'Association of German Soldiers' (Verband deutscher Soldaten), distanced himself and his organisation from the military resistance promptly after its foundation in September 1951.⁹³ Similarly, Ludwig Gümbel, the chairman of the Bavarian branch of the association, even called for the survivors of the coup to refrain from returning to the army since their return might undermine the "soldierly spirit" of the troops and consequently render any future "*Wehrbeitrag*" impossible.⁹⁴ In the eyes of many former members of the Wehrmacht, the conspirators had broken their oath and therefore forfeited their honour. Yet, such defamatory comments were by no means limited to the veteran organisations; they came from all parts of the right-wing political milieu, as the Hedler and Remer trials in the early 1950s vividly illustrated. In both trials, noblemen and -women played prominent roles, as either joint plaintiffs or as witnesses.

Wolfgang Hedler, a former member of the Stahlhelm and the NSDAP, had joined the Bundestag for the Deutsche Partei in 1949. Only months later, he delivered a speech at the Deutsche Haus in Einfeld bei Neumünster, in which, while repeatedly trying to trivialise Germany's responsibility for the

⁹² Heiko Buschke, *Deutsche Presse, Rechtsextremismus und nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit in der Ära Adenauer* (Frankfurt a. M., 2003), p. 188.

⁹³ Paul Sethe, Der falsche Weg, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 04.10.1951.

⁹⁴ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1.10.1951; *WELT*, 05.10.1951; both cited in: Claudia Fröhlich, Phasen und Themen der Judikatur zum 20. Juli 1944, in: Johannes Tuchel (ed.), *Der vergessene Widerstand, Zur Realgeschichte und Wahrnehmung des Kampfes gegen die NS-Diktatur* (Göttingen, 2005), p. 212.

outbreak of the war and indulging in hateful tirades against the Jews, he also in passing disparaged the conspirators of 20 July as *Landesverräter*.⁹⁵ Confronted with his statements later, Hedler unreservedly admitted to all of them, with the exception of his comments about the Jews. As a result, Hedler was charged with slander. To protect the interests of the former resistance fighters, various relatives came forward to serve as joint-plaintiffs; among them were Erika von Tresckow and Clarita von Trott zu Solz.⁹⁶ In the subsequent trial for slander, chaired by three judges, of whom two were fellow former NSDAP members, Hedler was acquitted of all charges.⁹⁷ According to the opinion of the court, not enough evidence had been brought forward to justify a conviction of Hedler. Furthermore, the court stated that this was a juristic and not political verdict and therefore the political opinions of dissenters had to be respected.⁹⁸

Public reaction was divided, but vehement on both sides. While sympathisers cheered Hedler as he was leaving the court, the media response was critical.⁹⁹ Even though Ernst Friedländer of *Die Zeit* stated that “there are more pressing issues than Hedler”¹⁰⁰ and Paul Sethe of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* cautioned against “demanding that a court

⁹⁵ Geteilte Meinung eines Abgeordneten über Vergasung von Juden, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12.12.1949.

⁹⁶ Manfred Jenke, *Verschörung von rechts? Ein Bericht über den Rechtsradikalismus in Deutschland nach 1945* (Berlin, 1961), p. 126.

⁹⁷ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, pp. 310–312.

⁹⁸ Buschke, *Deutsche Presse, Rechtsextremismus und nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, p. 130.

⁹⁹ Freispruch Hedlers aus Mangel an Beweisen, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16.02.1950; See also: Widerstandskämpfer beleidigt?, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 03.02.1950; Ein Schlag gegen Deutschland, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16.02.1950.

¹⁰⁰ Es gibt Wichtigeres als Hedler, *Die Zeit*, 23.02.1950.

pass judgement on a man only because he has politically dangerous ideas",¹⁰¹ numerous articles appeared that sharply condemned Hedler's acquittal. Jan Molitor of *Die Zeit* called Hedler's statements a "defamation of all Germans" and concluded: "bad enough that Hedler talked; but it is even worse that there are people who rushed to listen to him; the worst, however, is that after all that there are still people who believe in him".¹⁰² Hans Henrich of the *Frankfurter Rundschau* sharply criticised the verdict and especially the conduct of the presiding judge, Otto Paulick, "who literally put exculpatory statements into the witnesses' mouths and, without reprimanding anybody, allowed for provoking Nazi statements to surface".¹⁰³

Of the political parties, the SPD was especially sharp in their criticism of Hedler's acquittal. Erich Ollenhauer, as the representative of the SPD's parliamentary group, called the verdict "another powerful impairment and defilement of the German people".¹⁰⁴ The prosecution also remained convinced of Hedler's guilt and appealed to the next judicial level, which eventually resulted in Hedler's conviction to nine months imprisonment. The fact that he was found guilty "of defamation in concomitance with denigration of the memory of the dead" proved to be a milestone for the rehabilitation of the military resistance. For the first time, an official German court had convicted somebody for denouncing the conspirators and thus indirectly approved of the actions taken against the regime on 20 July 1944.

¹⁰¹ Das Recht steht über der Partei, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18.02.1950.

¹⁰² ... und stehn geschlossen hinter Hedler, Der Prozeß von Neumünster – Gerichtliches Nachspiel eines politischen Skandals, *Die Zeit*, 09.02.1950.

¹⁰³ Warnung an alle, die es angeht, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 16.02.1950.

¹⁰⁴ Shida Kiani, *Wiedererfindung der Nation nach dem Nationalsozialismus? Konfliktlinien und Positionen in der westdeutschen Nachkriegspolitik* (Wiesbaden, 2013), p. 285.

Yet, it was not until the Remer trial in 1952 that a German court officially and legally rehabilitated the 20 July resistance.

Otto Ernst Remer, like Hedler, had denounced the conspirators as hired *Landesverräter*, and faced charges in the spring of 1952. Due to his prominence as former commanding officer of the guards' battalion Großdeutschland, which was responsible for crushing the coup on 20 July 1944, his trial received enormous public attention.¹⁰⁵ This time, however, the prosecution did not simply settle for charging an individual with slander, but simultaneously used the case as a platform to establish a legal rehabilitation of the military resistance.¹⁰⁶ No one less than the attorney general of Braunschweig himself, Fritz Bauer, represented the prosecution. Dr. Erich Günther Topf, a former member of the SA and NSDAP, who had originally been in charge of the case, was unwilling to allow the charge against Remer. Fritz Bauer, a social democrat of Jewish origin, had himself been a victim of the Nazi-regime and only survived the war by escaping to Denmark in 1935.¹⁰⁷ Bauer quickly realised that this case could become a test case for the rehabilitation of the resistance, and thus personally saw to the transferral of Dr. Topf so that he himself could take over the case.¹⁰⁸ Once

¹⁰⁵ More than sixty journalists from domestic and foreign newspapers had arrived in Braunschweig to cover the trial. See: Dirk Geile, *Der Remer-Mythos in der frühen Bundesrepublik. Ein Beitrag zum organisierten Rechtsextremismus in Niedersachsen* (Göttingen, 1993), p. 124.

¹⁰⁶ Attorney General Fritz Bauer stated, inter alia in an interview on 24.12.1964, that his main intention during the Remer case was the "rehabilitation of the resistance fighters" and "nothing else". Cited in: Claudia Fröhlich, *Wider die Tabuisierung des Ungehorsams, Fritz Bauers Widerstandsbegriff und die Aufarbeitung von NS-Verbrechen* (Frankfurt a. M., 2006), p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 123.

¹⁰⁸ Buschke, *Deutsche Presse, Rechtsextremismus und nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, p. 190.

again, prominent nobles such as Marion Yorck von Wartenburg, Alexander von Hase and Fabian von Schlabrendorff came forward to serve as joint plaintiffs and witnesses in order to restore the reputation of the 20 July conspirators.¹⁰⁹

The question the trial finally sought to address was whether the actions of the resistance movement could be classified as *Hoch-* or even *Landesverrat*.¹¹⁰ By using the term *Landesverräter*, Remer had accused the conspirators of intentionally risking both external security, as well as indeed the very existence of the state itself. This accusation might have been appropriate for resistance circles such as the Rote Kapelle or the Zentralkomitee Freies Deutschland who had maintained close relations to the enemies of the Third Reich, especially the former who had repetitively passed military secrets to the Allies with the intention of harming the German war effort.¹¹¹ With regard to the military resistance, however, this accusation proved to be more difficult to uphold. The men of 20 July clearly intended to overthrow the government and were, therefore, guilty of *Hochverrat* in a strictly legal sense. They did not, however, intend to weaken the army, destroy the state or plot

¹⁰⁹ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 348.

¹¹⁰ See: Boris Burghardt, Vor 60 Jahren: Fritz Bauer und der Braunschweiger Remer-Prozess. Ein Strafverfahren als Vehikel der Geschichtspolitik, in: *Journal der Juristischen Zeitgeschichte*, 6:2 (2012), p. 48.

¹¹¹ See: Hans Coppi, Die Rote Kapelle im Spannungsfeld von Widerstand und nachrichtendienstlicher Tätigkeit – Der Trepper Report vom Juni 1943, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 44:3 (1996), pp. 431–458.

with the enemy, which would have been necessary to qualify for *Landesverrat*.¹¹²

The only weak link in this argument was Major General Hans Oster. Although Oster did not actively participate in the plot of 20 July 1944, he had been one of the founding fathers of the military resistance. Until he was placed under house detention following the arrest of Hans von Dohnanyi in March 1943, Oster, according to Schlabrendorff, had been the “manager” of the military resistance.¹¹³ During the phoney war, however, Oster had repeatedly passed on the dates of the German attack on the Low Countries to Dutch and Belgian sources to allow the Allies to halt the German offensive and force Germany into a negotiated peace to prevent further hostilities.¹¹⁴ In legal terms, this behaviour could certainly be classified as *Landesverrat*. Nevertheless, Oster’s independent actions from early 1940 had no direct link to the actual plot of 20 July 1944. Consequently, from the very beginning, the attorney general Fritz Bauer meticulously tried to limit the scope of the trial to the men of 20 July only, enabling him to obtain a conviction of Remer for slander, as well as once and for all exculpating the conspirators from the accusation of *Landesverrat*. The defence’s efforts to include Oster and other

¹¹² See the various comments of expert witnesses during the Remer Trial: Hans Lukaschek (Kreisau Circle): The conspirators “looked out for people who were willing to oppose Hitler in order to save Germany [...] None of them ever contemplated the idea of *Landesverrat*.”, *Neue Zeitung*, 11.03.1952; Karl Friedrich Bonhoeffer (Brother of Dietrich Bonhoeffer): “My brother regarded Hitler as the ‘Anti-Christ’ and hoped for the failure of all his plans. Germany meant everything to my brother.” *Neue Zeitung*, 11.03.1952, cited in: Claudia Fröhlich, *Phasen und Themen der Judikatur zum 20. Juli 1944*, p. 219.

¹¹³ Fest, *Staatsstreich*, p. 204.

¹¹⁴ Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen, *Die Niederlande und der Alarm im Januar 1940*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 8:1 (1960), p. 23.

resistance groups such as the Rote Kapelle, hence generalising the term 'resistance' to justify Remer's comments, were quashed by the court. Yet, Bauer's mission to rehabilitate the military resistance went beyond simply absolving them from the suspicion of *Landesverrat*. His ultimate goal was to classify the Third Reich as an illegitimate regime (*Unrechtsstaat*) and thus establish a concept of ethical *Hochverrat*, some kind of legitimate resistance, designed to retrospectively acquit the resistance from all charges.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, the court only partly followed Bauer's argument. While acknowledging that the Nazi regime encouraged and committed crimes against both the German and occupied peoples, thus jeopardising the regime's legality, the court failed to comment on the Third Reich's constitutional legality, despite even using the term *Unrechtsstaat*, and therefore failed to challenge the validity of laws and regulations enacted by the regime.¹¹⁶ Thus Bauer's attempt to obtain a legal ruling for a general right of resistance did not materialise. Nevertheless, the court did follow Bauer's legal description of the men of 20 July 1944, legalising their actions by claiming that all of them "driven by burning love for their fatherland and an altruistic [...] sense of responsibility for their people had strived for a removal of Hitler and thus his regime".¹¹⁷ Essentially, the court dictated that the convictions against the military resistance were ultimately determinative to legally exculpate their actions. Thus, by basing the resistance's acquittal from *Hochverrat* on their unique motives, rather than their actions, the court

¹¹⁵ See: Remer wird zur Randfigur des Prozesses, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.03.1952.

¹¹⁶ Herbert Kraus (ed.), *Die im Braunschweiger Remerprozeß erstatteten moraltheologischen und historischen Gutachten nebst Urteil* (Hamburg, 1953), pp. 122–123.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 128.

did not have to follow Bauer's argument of classifying the Third Reich as an illegal regime, with all the legal consequences this would have brought with it.¹¹⁸ They were also simultaneously able to limit the concept of ethical *Hochverrat* specifically to 20 July 1944 without having to set a precedent for a right of resistance in general.

Yet, for all the continuing contention, it is safe to say that the Hedler and Remer trials were vital steps towards the entrenchment of the military resistance in public memory. The sheer publicity the trials provided marked the beginning of a comprehensive public debate of the events of 20 July 1944.¹¹⁹ The *FAZ* raised the issue of whether the moral assessment of the resistance should be left to a court rather than parliament. "One cannot pass the task of the historians to the judges. [...] The rehabilitation of the brave resistance fighters is a highly pressing affair, which parliament should address. This would enable courts to pass better and more precise judgements."¹²⁰ The majority of German newspapers, however, acclaimed the trial and the conviction of Remer. The *SZ* stated that "it was of primary importance" that for the first time, a German court had come to the conclusion that patriotic resistance against Hitler, also in times of war, was justified.¹²¹ Josef Müller-Marein of *Die Zeit* drew a similar conclusion,

¹¹⁸ Boris Burghardt, Vor 60 Jahren: Fritz Bauer und der Braunschweiger Remer-Prozess. Ein Strafverfahren als Vehikel der Geschichtspolitik, in: *Journal der Juristischen Zeitgeschichte*, 6:2 (2012), p. 51.

¹¹⁹ Overall thirty-four articles concerning the Remer trial were published. *FAZ* (9 articles), *Frankfurter Rundschau* (8), *WELT* (7), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6), *Die Zeit* (2) and *SPIEGEL* (2), See: Buschke, *Deutsche Presse, Rechtsextremismus und nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit in der Ära Adenauer*, p. 195.

¹²⁰ Die Richter in Gewissensnot, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12.03.1952.

¹²¹ Das Streiflicht, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17.03.1952.

welcoming the fact that “a German court finally served as a setting for a profound rehabilitation of the resistance fighters against Hitler”,¹²² and the *Welt* described the verdict simply as a “highly significant political event”.¹²³

Furthermore, the trials not only spurred a public debate, but also solidified, at least for the foreseeable future, the position of the military resistance as the only true and morally righteous resistance movement of the Third Reich. The case somewhat led to “an idealisation of the political intentions of the conspirators, who in the end were virtually perceived as the fathers of West German democracy”.¹²⁴ Crucial in this regard were the statements of Fabian von Schlabrendorff during the trial. Due to his literary account of his involvement in the plot, Schlabrendorff was certainly one of the best-known surviving members of the conspiracy, and accordingly weighty was his word. Just like Bauer, Schlabrendorff had been concerned that a generalisation of resistance, and hence an inclusion of resistance movements such as the Rote Kapelle or the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland, might have jeopardised the entire case against Remer. Consequently, Schlabrendorff did not refrain from strongly defaming all types of leftist/communist resistance movements by insinuating that all of them had

¹²² Die Schatten der Toten vom 20. Juli..., *Die Zeit*, 13.03.1952.

¹²³ Das Urteil im Remer Prozess, *WELT*, 17.03.1952.

¹²⁴ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 350; see also: Hans Mommsen, Die Geschichte des deutschen Widerstands im Lichte der neueren Forschung, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (50/1986), pp. 3–18.

been “motivated by the hope for material gains” and thus were unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath as the 20 July conspiracy.¹²⁵

Hence, by debasing the achievements of other resistance groups while simultaneously portraying the military resistance as the only true form of opposition – motivated by unique “high ethical convictions”¹²⁶ – Schlabrendorff clearly aimed to monopolise the commemoration of resistance against the Nazi-regime, and thus laid the foundation for a positive commemoration of 20 July 1944.

It was precisely the high ethical convictions that Schlabrendorff later ascribed to the conspirators of 20 July, which formed the basis of the nobility’s transfiguration of the failed coup into a ‘noble revolt’. Once the dominant account of the resistance began to focus on individualised portraits of high-minded martyrs for a sacred cause, whom were distinguished by certain common attributes – independence, courage, the call to leadership and sacrifice – it was only a small step, as we shall see, to frame the resistance as the manifestation of a specifically noble corporate personality. Painting the resistance as a righteous enterprise limited to the events of 1944 helped to integrate the nobility, but it also had the not-unwelcome effect of excluding other groups from acknowledgement. For example, the communist resistance was continued to be seen as a Soviet-driven espionage network. Thus, the Remer trial, as Joachim Göres has put it, triggered not only the

¹²⁵ Johannes Tuchel, *Vergessen, verdrängt, ignoriert – Überlegungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des Widerstands gegen den Nationalsozialismus im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, in: Tuchel, *Der vergessene Widerstand*, p. 25.

¹²⁶ See the coverage of Schlabrendorff’s testimony at the Redler trial in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.03.1952.

mythologisation of the military resistance, but also the demonisation of leftist resistance groups such as the Rote Kapelle.¹²⁷

The Government's Role in Commemoration

While German courts were busy resolving the legal questions surrounding the rehabilitation of the military resistance, various politicians also expedited its establishment in public memory. For years, however, these efforts consisted of individual actions rather than official policy. It would be another decade before the government took measures to ensure that all public buildings were flagged on 20 July to commemorate the attempted plot.¹²⁸ Early positive references to the military resistance proved to be a highly sensitive balancing act for the government. On the one hand, the military resistance movement was ideally suited to serve as a founding myth of the new state by offering certain values and traditions, which had entirely been forfeited by the Nazi regime. On the other hand, for millions of German soldiers who were trying collectively, as well as individually, to make sense of their intolerable sacrifices during the war, the resistance was predominantly associated with the breach of the oath and hence had no majority appeal. Consequently, every attempt by a German politician to honour the military resistance inevitably proved to be a delicate affair. Thus,

¹²⁷ Der Anwalt des Widerstands, *Die Tageszeitung*, 28.08.2012.

¹²⁸ It was not until July 1964, twenty years after the attempted coup, that all public buildings were flagged in commemoration of 20 July 1944. See: Regina Holler, Die Funktion des Widerstands 1933–1945 gegen den Nationalsozialismus für die politische Kultur der Bundesrepublik von 1945 bis heute, in: Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium (ed.), *50 Jahre 20. Juli 1944. Dokumentation der Fachtagung am 14. Juli 1994 in Hannover* (Hanover, 1995), p. 98.

it is not surprising that its first main advocates almost exclusively had close ties with the resistance movement themselves and were driven by strong personal motivations to rebuild its reputation.

One of the key promoters of this process was Jakob Kaiser, minister for all-German affairs in the first cabinet of Konrad Adenauer. Kaiser, a leading member of the Zentrum party, as well as the Christian Union until the advent of the Third Reich, had joined the civil resistance as early as 1934. His close connections to Carl Goerdeler, as well as representatives of the military opposition, put him in the focus of the Gestapo after 20 July and he only just managed to escape by hiding in a basement in Potsdam for the rest of the war. These personal experiences encouraged him to work deliberately for the acceptance of the resistance in public memory, and in 1947, he was one of the first important politicians to publicly take a stance for the resistance. On 20 July 1947, Kaiser labelled the attempted coup as “an achievement of the German people” and a “positive fact” which ought to be acknowledged in favour of Germany.¹²⁹ Much more detailed and even wider in scope, was his radio speech in commemoration of the six year anniversary of the coup in 1950, in which he praised the resistance as a role model for the “free people of the world” and requested that “the victims of 20 July may serve as a reminder, model and example in the struggle against the dangers of dictatorships”.¹³⁰ Through these statements, Kaiser deliberately attempted to elevate the military resistance to a general national liberation movement and

¹²⁹ Drei Jahre danach, *Neue Zeit*, 20.07.1947.

¹³⁰ Jakob Kaiser, Speech in Nord West Deutscher Rundfunk, 20.07.1950 at 20:00 hrs, cited in: Fröhlich, *Phasen und Themen der Judikatur zum 20. Juli 1944*, p. 210.

thereby paved the way for it to become part of the founding myth of the FRG.

Yet Kaiser's commitment to the cause was not only personal, but also led by strong pragmatic political motives. Following the numerous defamations of the military resistance by veteran associations, as well as right-wing politicians throughout 1951, the Allied Commission became increasingly anxious about a re-emergence of National Socialist tendencies, and demanded action on behalf of the government. In reaction, Jakob Kaiser gave a speech on 2 October 1951, as the official representative of Konrad Adenauer, in which he condemned these defamatory outbursts. "The men and women of the 20 July proved to the world that not all Germans had been taken in by National Socialism."¹³¹ The government tended to be very careful in taking a stance about the resistance, and in this case, only came forward due to considerable Allied pressure. Furthermore, it was characteristic of the ambivalence of the Adenauer administration that Adenauer had originally intended to give the speech himself, but had changed his mind at the last moment,¹³² instead passing on this delicate matter to one of his ministers, in order to escape the line of fire. For some time, this speech was to remain one

¹³¹ David Clay Large, *Uses of the Past: The Anti-Nazi Resistance Legacy in the Federal Republic of Germany*, in: David Clay Large (ed.), *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 167.

¹³² Klaus Gotto, Hans-Otto Kleinmann, Reinhard Schreiner (eds), *Im Zentrum der Macht: Das Tagebuch von Staatssekretär Lenz, 1951–1953* (Düsseldorf, 1989), p. 81.

of the very few official statements of the Adenauer administration in support of the military resistance.¹³³

Another protagonist in this context was Otto Lenz, permanent secretary of the German Chancellery from 1951 to 1953 and former member of the group supporting Carl Goerdeler. Designated for the same position in Goerdeler's shadow cabinet, Lenz was intended to occupy one of the key roles in a post-Nazi government. Imprisoned shortly after 20 July 1944, he was sentenced to four years in gaol and remained there until the end of the war. In the summer of 1945, Lenz served as one of the founding fathers of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and consequently became one of the most prominent politicians of the early Federal Republic.¹³⁴ His position as head of the Chancellery provided him with enormous influence. Given his background, it is not surprising that he became one of the main advocates of the military resistance in the immediate post-war era. Norbert Frei points him out as the key personality who repeatedly and deliberately tried to induce Adenauer to acknowledge officially the actions of the military resistance. The official statement 2 October 1951 given by Kaiser on behalf of the government was apparently also initiated and devised by Otto Lenz.¹³⁵ In

¹³³ Peter Steinbach, *Widerstand im Dritten Reich – Die Keimzelle der Nachkriegsdemokratie? Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Widerstand in der historischen politischen Bildungsarbeit, in den Medien und in der öffentlichen Meinung nach 1945*, in: Gerd R. Ueberschär (ed.), *Der 20. Juli 1944. Bewertung und Rezeption des deutschen Widerstandes gegen das NS-Regime* (Cologne, 1994), p. 98.

¹³⁴ See: Kurzer Lebenslauf Otto Lenz, Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien e. V., online at: www.kgparl.de/online-volksvertretung/pdf/mdb-l.pdf.

¹³⁵ Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir, Erinnerungskampf: Der 20. Juli in den Bonner Anfangsjahren* (Munich, 2005), p. 139.

addition to his continuous clandestine impact on Konrad Adenauer, Otto Lenz also took a public stance in support of the resistance. Characteristic of his work was his speech at the nine-year anniversary of the plot in the Bendlerblock in Berlin, where he, alongside Professor Ernst Reuter, extensively praised the conspirators' sacrifice for the greater good of Germany.¹³⁶

While Kaiser and Lenz can arguably be regarded as the most outspoken advocates of the military resistance in Adenauer's cabinet, one should not forget the persistent work of Robert Lehr, which was especially dominated by his relentless efforts to counter the re-emergence of National Socialist tendencies in the Federal Republic. Lehr, who had been mayor of Düsseldorf during the Weimar Republic, was removed from office by the Nazis in 1933 and subsequently joined the resistance. Unlike Lenz, however, he was able to escape the purges of the Gestapo following 20 July 1944. At the behest of the Allies, Lehr occupied several posts after the war before joining Lenz in becoming a founding member of the CDU.¹³⁷ In 1950, he was appointed Home Secretary and promptly began to rigorously fight the re-emerging neo-National Socialist movement. The Socialist Reich Party (Sozialistische Reichspartei), the self-appointed successor party of the NSDAP, was founded in 1949 under the leadership of former Major General Otto-Ernst Remer, who had been responsible for the violent suppression of the attempted coup of 20

¹³⁶ Dr. Otto Lenz, Sie starben für eine große Sache, Rede des Staatssekretärs im Bundeskanzleramt Dr. Otto Lenz am 19.07.1953 im Ehrenhof des Bendlerblocks in Berlin, online at: www.20-juli-44.de/reden/.

¹³⁷ Kurzer Lebenslauf Robert Lehr. Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien e. V., online at: www.kgparl.de/online-volksvertretung/pdf/mdb-l.pdf.

July 1944. Alarmed by the party's growing popularity, especially in Northern Germany, Lehr uncompromisingly demanded the immediate prohibition of the party. At this time, however, the Federal Constitutional Court had not yet been founded and the majority of Lehr's colleagues in the cabinet refused to act without it. It was therefore another year until the government took legal action against the SRP.¹³⁸ In the meantime, Lehr's feud with the SRP, and especially Remer, continued. When Remer accused the conspirators of treason in May 1951, it was Lehr himself who pressed charges, and thus laid the groundwork for the Remer trial and the subsequent legal rehabilitation of the military resistance.

Strong support for the resistance also came from the official bulletins of the government. Two special editions in honour of the failed coup in 1952 and 1954 show how deliberately, although still not explicitly, the government worked for the commemoration of the resistance.¹³⁹ These editions, once again, also clearly reflect the efforts to link the foundation of the FRG to the principles of the resistance movement, and hence portray the FRG as a state which had emerged from the national liberation movement against Hitler. Despite the legal acquittal in 1952, increasing support by politicians, and a growing acceptance among the public, it was not until the ten-year anniversary of 20 July 1944 that the government officially exonerated the military resistance. Theodor Heuss' speech in the Bendlerblock clearly

¹³⁸ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 336.

¹³⁹ See: Special edition of "Das Parlament" 1952: Die Wahrheit über den 20. Juli 1944 – den hellsten und den schwärzesten Tag der neueren deutschen Geschichte; 1954: Mutige Männer folgen dem Rufe ihres Gewissens – Was uns der 20. Juli bedeutet/Erinnerungen Überlebender. Cited in: Regina Holler, *20. Juli 1944 Vermächtnis oder Alibi?* (Munich, 1994), p. 88.

marked the caesura in the acceptance process of 20 July and the entrenchment of the military resistance in public memory.

As president of the FRG, Heuss was seen as the pinnacle moral authority of the republic. Having lost several friends during the purges that followed 20 July 1944, Heuss had not only political, but also personal, motivations at heart. His speech 19 July 1954 at the auditorium of the Free University of Berlin intended once again to draw a connection between the resistance and a general national liberation movement. In his speech, Heuss elaborately addressed the ethical predicament of the conspirators who swayed between the binding power of their oath and the imperatives of conscience. He explicitly justified their actions by reference to the fact that the Third Reich had been an “entirely discredited regime”.¹⁴⁰ Heuss claimed that every oath included a bilateral obligation and that Hitler “had already – in a technical-legal, as well as a moral-historical sense – repeatedly broken that oath”.¹⁴¹ Thus Heuss not only picked up Bauer’s argument from the Remer trial, but simultaneously also addressed the concerns of millions of former soldiers who believed the actions of the resistance to have accelerated the military downfall of Germany. He insisted that Hitler’s war against the world had already been lost by that time: “surely, there remain only very few sensible people today who might dispute this”.¹⁴² Furthermore, Heuss explicitly refrained from establishing an obligation to resist, and thereby inculcated

¹⁴⁰ Theodor Heuss, Der 20. Juli 1944, Rede des Bundespräsidenten Prof. Dr. Theodor Heuss am 19. Juli 1954 im Auditorium Maximum der Freien Universität Berlin, online at: www.20-juli-44.de/reden/.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 1.

the bulk of the Wehrmacht that had not resisted, but rather sanctioned action against a criminal regime. He delineated the exceptional situation of the conspirators and emphasised that “their behaviour cannot be regarded as a universal norm, but as a morally legitimate decision in an extraordinary situation”.¹⁴³

This successful balancing act of simultaneously accounting for the concerns of the soldiers, as well as the deeds of the resistance, turned out to be crucial for the gradual reconciliation of both factions. As Ernst Wolfgang Becker has argued, Heuss succeeded not only in initiating a turning point within public reception, but also in establishing a positive tradition of commemoration.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, certain parts of society clearly perceived his speech as somewhat a provocation, and dozens of furious letters reached the Federal President’s Office in the following weeks.¹⁴⁵ The media, however, generally responded positively, not only to Heuss’ speech, but also to the commemoration in general. Almost all the major newspapers opened with comprehensive articles on the failed coup and various radio stations broadcasted a concerted program about “what happened ten years ago”.¹⁴⁶ The SZ printed the entire speech, added farewell letters of executed resistance fighters, and concluded: “no officer, soldier or civil servant, who himself lacked the moral courage to take extraordinary decisions due to their

¹⁴³ Ulrich Baumgärtner, *Reden nach Hitler, Theodor Heuss – Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2001), p. 319.

¹⁴⁴ Ernst Wolfgang Becker, *Theodor Heuss, Bürger im Zeitalter der Extreme* (Stuttgart, 2011), p. 139.

¹⁴⁵ Becker, *Theodor Heuss, Bürger im Zeitalter der Extreme*, pp. 328/329.

¹⁴⁶ See: Was vor 10 Jahren geschah, *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NDR)*, 20.07.1954; Was vor 10 Jahren geschah, *Sender Freies Berlin (SFB)*, 20.07.1954; Was vor 10 Jahren geschah, *Bayrischer Rundfunk (BR)*, 20.07.1954.

own weakness at the time, nowadays has the right to denounce as traitors those who had the courage to act".¹⁴⁷ The *Neue Zeitung* saw in the conspirators "men who, for the sake of their people, risked everything and sacrificed themselves"¹⁴⁸ and the *FAZ* remarked in reference to Heuss' speech that "all we know is this: the 20th of July 1944 was the proudest day in those murky twelve years".¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Bundestag issued a cross-party initiative in which it prompted the government to "publish the speech and distribute complimentary brochures to the youth". The first edition amounted to 3.2 million copies, and thereby not only secured enormous publicity, but also characterised the speech as an official statement of the government.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, the positive establishment of the military resistance in public memory can be considered as a long and bumpy road. The early years were clearly dominated by individual attempts of commemoration on the part of people connected to the coup and widespread suppression on the part of the general public. The overcoming of the immediate post-war struggles and the foundation of the Federal Republic, however, significantly changed this situation, and allowed the resistance to become a topic of public interest,

¹⁴⁷ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20.07.1954, p. 3, cited in: Baumgärtner, *Reden nach Hitler*, p. 325.

¹⁴⁸ Noch nicht eingelöst, *Neue Zeitung*, 20.07.1954.

¹⁴⁹ Für immer gescheitert?, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20.07.1954.

¹⁵⁰ Baumgärtner, *Reden nach Hitler*, pp. 327, 328.

though it continued to be fiercely debated over the following years in court, as well as in public.

Although the nobility as a corporate actor did not dominate or steer this process, noblemen and –women significantly contributed both to the rehabilitation of the military resistance and to its establishment as the primary resistance movement against the Nazi regime. By serving as joint plaintiffs and witnesses in court, as lobbyists within the *Hilfswerk 20 July* and as authors of detailed books and articles about the motives and convictions of the conspirators, these nobles helped to form the foundation of a positive commemoration of the military resistance. The task of paving the way to a gradual reconciliation with public traction ultimately fell to members of the government. The president's speech at the ten-year anniversary tipped the balance in favour of a positive commemoration.

The 'Ennoblement' of the Military Resistance

Introduction

As imperative as the rehabilitation of the resistance was for the surviving members and their relatives, it also proved to be of profound importance for the East-Elbian nobility as a social class. Through deliberate association with the resistance movement, the nobility was able to begin restoring their standing in German society. How representatives of the German nobility established this association, what the resulting consequences for their reputation were, and what this meant for the legacy of the resistance, are the subjects of this chapter. Before dealing with this development, we must recall the point of departure, namely, that in 1945, the majority of the population was aware that the nobility, in a very prominent and a visible way, had been involved in the Nazi seizure of power and the subsequent consolidation of the regime.

Convergence and Estrangement: the Nazis' Ambiguous Relationship with the Nobility

In the early 1930s, the Nazi movement and the old elites faced similarly precarious situations. The belief gained ground that strategic cooperation between them could yield reciprocal benefits. Despite their electoral successes, the Nazis had not yet found a way to seize control over German

politics. The levers of power – from the presidential office to the higher bureaucracy and the officer corps – were still in the hands of the old elites. Over the same period, however, those elites had gradually lost their influence over the basis of German politics and society.¹ To many elite conservatives, it seemed obvious that the key to breaking the deadlock lay in collaboration with Hitler. The main proponents of this idea were: the military leaders connected with General Kurt von Schleicher; a faction of the East-Elbian landowners; the reactionary wing of heavy industry from the Rhineland; and the German National People's Party (Deutschnationale Volkspartei), led by Alfred Hugenberg.² By the beginning of 1933, they had come to the conclusion that Hitler was the most promising candidate not only for ensuring a reconnection with the masses, but also for restoring Germany to its former hegemonic position in Europe.³ Within these groups, the nobility still played a key role. Based on their strong position within the army, the civil service, and the Gutsbezirke, the support of the nobility proved to be a decisive factor in the amalgamation of the Nazis and the traditional elites in 1933.⁴

¹ Heinrich August Winkler, *Requiem für eine Republik, Zum Problem der Verantwortung für das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Republik*, in: Peter Steinbach und Johannes Tuchel (eds), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1994), p. 58.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³ Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Nationalkonservative Eliten zwischen Kooperation und Widerstand*, in: Schmädke und Steinbach (eds), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 24–27.

⁴ For points of contact between the Nazis and the nobility especially see Stephan Malinowski's chapter: *Der deutsche Adel und die NS-Bewegung*, in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 476 et sqq.; for the nobility's role in the army see: Francis L. Carsten, *Der preußische Adel bis 1945*, in: Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950* (Göttingen, 1990), pp. 120–123; Albert Grzesinski, the interior minister of Prussia in the late 1920s, referred to the Gutsbezirke as "small absolute lordships", which continued to

The prominent and visible roles many noblemen played during the final year of the Weimar Republic made it easy to hold the nobility as a whole responsible for the collapse of the democratic system. Following Heinrich Brüning's and Wilhelm Groener's resignations as Chancellor and Minister of Defence respectively, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher on 1 June 1932. Papen quickly set up a staunchly conservative cabinet, which would later be known as the "Cabinet of Barons" due to its predominant share of noblemen.⁵ In doing so, Hindenburg, who had seen Brüning's failure to ensure his re-election in spring 1932 by means of a united conservative front as a personal insult⁶, hoped that Papen would be able to stabilise the political situation and achieve a gathering of all right wing forces to reinforce the power of the old elites and prevent any further drift to the left. Papen's, and subsequently Schleicher's, complete failure to bring this about eventually paved the way for Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship in January 1933.

Additionally, numerous noblemen facilitated the rise of National Socialist organisations such as the Sturmabteilung (SA) and Schutzstaffel (SS). Among the high-ranking SA leaders – Stabschefs, Obergruppenführer and

guarantee noble power in the rural areas of East Elbia. See: Albert Grzesinski, *Im Kampf um die deutsche Republik. Erinnerungen eines Sozialdemokraten* (Munich, 2001), p. 198.

⁵ Papen's cabinet consisted of one count, four barons, two untitled noblemen and only three commoners. See: Karsten Steiger, *Kooperation, Konfrontation, Untergang, Das Weimarer Tarif- und Schlichtungswesen während der Weltwirtschaftskrise und seine Vorbedingungen* (Stuttgart, 1998), p. 219.

⁶ Hindenburg's re-election was eventually secured by the votes of the social democrats and the Zentrum who saw him as the lesser evil in comparison to Adolf Hitler, who had been able to gather numerous conservative votes. See: Winkler, *Requiem für eine Republik*, in: Steinbach und Tüchel (eds), *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, p. 61.

Gruppenführer – approximately ten per cent were noblemen.⁷ Similarly, members of the nobility held fourteen per cent of the highest SS ranks.⁸ Yet, while entries into the lower ranks remained limited, noblemen indirectly supported the organisations' activities by providing funds and facilities. Especially in Silesia and East Prussia, many estates were offered as SA training camps – among them, the vast estates of Hermann Count Dohna and Konrad Count Finckenstein – and hence significantly assisted in the fine-tuning of SA's running and organisation.⁹ In such areas, where the patrimonial system was still very much in motion, such open fraternisation of the landed gentry and the organisations of the regime did have significant influence on the rural population.

Additionally, the symbolism of the public support offered by individuals, such as Prince August Wilhelm of Prussia and Duke Carl Eduard of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha, was vital at the time, as it bestowed a degree of legitimacy upon the new movement. It is worth reaffirming that during this period, Germany was still a class-conscious society. Centuries of submissiveness to the aristocracy had not yet been overcome in the short span of the Weimar

⁷ Bruce B. Campbell, *The SA Generals and the Rise of Nazism* (Kentucky, 1998), pp. 164–166.

⁸ Malinowski, Es war kein Aufstand des Adels, *Cicero*, 01.07.2004. Also see: Eckart Conze, Adel unter dem Totenkopf. Die Idee eines Neuadels in den Gesellschaftsvorstellungen der SS, in: Eckart Conze und Monika Wienfort (eds), *Adel und Moderne – Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2004), pp. 151–180.

⁹ Stephan Malinowski und Sven Reichardt, Die Reihen fest geschlossen? Adlige im Führerkorps der SA bis 1934, in: Conze und Wienfort (eds), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 140.

Republic. The emphatic support of August Wilhelm, the Kaiser's son, reconciled a certain number of sceptics.¹⁰

This association between nobility and National Socialism was further amplified by the nobility's strong position in the Wehrmacht and especially the general staff. Although the massive expansion of the officer corps in the 1930s had reduced the nobility's share of the corps significantly, nobles nevertheless maintained an immensely strong position among the leading ranks of the army.¹¹ Illustrious names like v. Manstein, v. Rundstedt, v. Kleist, v. Kluge, v. Arnim, v. Witzleben, and many more, became symbols of Hitler's war in the East, and hence founded the immediate post-war popular perception of the nobility's entanglement with the regime.

The narrative of the nobility's role in the Third Reich, however, has always been twofold. "Without the nobility there would not have been a *20 July 1944* – but neither a *30 January 1933*."¹² The role of the nobility in the events of January 1933 is today largely forgotten; by contrast, the failed coup of 20 July 1944 is almost exclusively associated with one of the most important founding myths of the German Federal Republic. Yet, in the immediate post-war era, that was not the case.

¹⁰ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich – The Princes von Hessen in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2006), p. 98; Also see Lothar Machtan, *Der Kaisersohn bei Hitler* (Hamburg, 2006).

¹¹ In fact, no less than thirteen out of twenty Field Marshalls of the army belonged to the nobility. See: Jürgen Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Eine strukturgeschichtliche Analyse* (Munich, 2009), p. 111.

¹² Alle berühmten Familien waren dabei, Interview mit Stephan Malinowski, *SPIEGEL* Special Geschichte, 1/2008, 29.01.2008.

By then, the rampantly anti-noble comments of Hitler and his entourage, who had tried to destroy the remaining vestiges of noble power after the failed coup, had found their way into public memory. Hitler defamed the conspirators as a small “clique of counts and reactionaries”¹³ and announced to a group of workers only hours after the failed coup that it was his “deep belief, that my enemies are the ‘vons’, who call themselves aristocrats”¹⁴ and thereby associated the nobility as a whole with treachery. Robert Ley’s infamous speech soon after, in which he labelled the nobility as “degenerated to the bone, blue-blooded to the point of idiocy, obnoxiously corrupt and as cowardly as all mean creatures” did not improve their reputation.¹⁵ Christian von Bernstorff described the ramifications of this anti-noble propaganda retrospectively in 1949. “Now we felt the consequences, which, due to the fact that the coup had been the work of noblemen, were directed against us as a social class.”¹⁶ Already existing animosities were now intensified by an omnipresent odium of treason. Thus, although the Nazis did not succeed in destroying the nobility root and branch, their propaganda during the final months of the Third Reich significantly contributed to a hostile public perception of this caste in the immediate post-war years.

This negative attitude had not suddenly emerged during the final months of the regime. Rather, it was the product of a long process that dated back to the

¹³ Walter Demel und Sylvia Schraut, *Der deutsche Adel: Lebensformen und Geschichte* (Munich, 2014), p. 119.

¹⁴ Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, p. 2127.

¹⁵ Robert Ley, Gott schütze den Führer, *Der Angriff*, 23.07.1944, cited in: Eckart Conze, *Adel und Adeligkeit im Widerstand des 20. Juli 1944*, in: Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, p. 269.

¹⁶ Conze, *Von Deutschem Adel*, p. 203.

formative years of the NSDAP. As early as 1924, during his time in prison, Hitler repeatedly disparaged the nobility as a caste whose “propagation was based solely on social and financial constraint”, a fact which ultimately led to “complete degeneration”.¹⁷ Similarly, Walther Darré, the subsequent Reich Minister of Food and Agriculture, railed against the nobility in a pamphlet in 1930, in which he claimed that “the majority of today’s nobility” would “hardly possess enough pure blood [...] to rival any predominantly Nordic peasant boy”.¹⁸ Besides a genuine contempt for the old elites, this violent language was most certainly also inspired by the snobbery of many noble families towards the National Socialist “upstarts”.¹⁹ Papen’s infamous comment that he had temporarily ‘hired’ Hitler, as well as Hindenburg’s practice of referring to Hitler as the “Bohemian lance-corporal”, are vivid displays of the nobility’s initial attitude.

These early populist comments from dignitaries of the NSDAP were still expressions of the original class struggle mentality on which the early ideology of the National Socialist Party was built. Once Hitler had realised during the early 1930s that a seizure of power was only possible in association with the old elites rather than against them, this violent rhetoric soon disappeared and made way for a more co-operative relationship. Their newly discovered mutual regard was expressed by Adolf Prince of Bentheim-Tecklenburg-Rheda, the head of the powerful *German Association of*

¹⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 270, cited in: Carsten, *Geschichte der preußischen Junker*, p. 179.

¹⁸ Georg H. Kleine, *Adelsgenossenschaft und Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 26:1 (1978), p. 113.

¹⁹ For examples of the nobility’s undying snobbery towards the Nazis, see various examples in post-war autobiographies in chapter III of this thesis.

Nobles, who assured Hitler in the summer of 1933 of the “allegiance of the German nobility”, adding that he intended to carry out “a large scale purge [...] among the ranks of the nobility”. This initiative ultimately resulted in the expulsion of almost two hundred and fifty noble members whose lineage, dating back to 1750, had included either Jewish or ‘coloured’ blood.²⁰ Even the more leftist Joseph Goebbels cautiously took to the rapprochement, as his diary reveals. On 31 January 1931, an evening he spent at the von Dirksens, he noted: “many visitors there: a nice girl, the daughter of the Empress, Prince Louis Ferdinand, Prince Philipp von Hessen, the son-in-law of the king of Italy – a very nice and inspirational man”.²¹

Post-war Perceptions: Nobility and Nazis as Two Sides of One Coin

Oddly enough, both the initial disparagements and the subsequent cooperation proved harmful to the nobility’s reputation in the immediate post war years. Parts of society which had maintained their loyalty to the ‘Führer’, even beyond the downfall of the Third Reich, now remembered Hitler’s initial reservations towards the nobility and partly blamed the nobility, especially in conjunction with the events of 20 July 1944, for the collapse of the regime. The majority of sceptics, though, regarded National Socialism and Junkertum as two sides of one coin, and the nobility as

²⁰ Kleine: Adelsgenossenschaft und Nationalsozialismus, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 119.

²¹ Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil I Aufzeichnungen 1923–1941 Band 2/I Dezember 1929 – Mai 1931* (Munich, 2005), p. 336; For the social rapprochement between the nobility and the Nazi elites also see: Fabrice d’Almeida, *High Society in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 141–171.

significantly responsible for the downfall of Germany.²² These sentiments expressed themselves in popular demands that the Junkers be held accountable. This was especially true for the Soviet Occupation Zone (SOZ), in which most of the remaining estates of the East-Elbian nobility were situated. The vast majority of the noble estates had already been relinquished during the final months of the war when the Red Army had swept through East Elbia, looting and plundering the manor houses and executing the few who had stayed behind. Among them were members of all the great East-Elbian families. In East Prussia, Alexander Count von Keyserlingk, Adolf von Puttkamer, Maria Countess Lehndorff, and her son, Heinfried, were shot. In Silesia, Colonel Hans von Witzendorff and his wife suffered the same fate. In Pomerania, Conrad von Kleist and Wilhelm Count Finck von Finckenstein were executed, and Henry von Zitzewitz was drowned in the lake of Templin. Wilhelm Count von Schlieffen, Rüdiger von der Goltz and Günther von Puttkamer were deported to the Soviet Union. Others, such as Sybille Countess von Bismarck, the daughter in law of the former Reich Chancellor, Cora von Alvensleben, and Gertrud and Irmgard von Knebel Doeberitz, committed suicide to escape the revenge of the Soviets.²³

The Soviet occupational government, however, went still further. Only weeks after the end of the war, the Soviets went to work to ensure the complete extinction of the nobility as a political and social force, by preparing not only the most substantial and significant land reform Germany

²² Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 425, 426.

²³ For the above and more examples see: Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 410–424.

had ever seen, but also by continuously publicly discrediting the Junkers as the ones responsible for the advent of Hitler and National Socialism.

As early as August 1945, the in-house newspaper of the Christian Democratic Union in the Soviet Occupation Zone condemned the “old reactionary Junkers”, whose “estates had been the breeding ground of reaction”, for “having regularly played a dangerous role” in German politics.²⁴ A similar stance was adopted in an executive order from the provisional government in the Soviet Occupation Zone from 5 October 1945, in which it accused the large estate owners and Junkers of “having always been the bearers of militarism and chauvinism”, whose “reactionary ideology was transformed into the most radical war-ideology during the reign of National Socialism”.²⁵ Ultimately, these early outbursts of anti-Junker sentiment were followed up by a decree which demanded that “the land reform must guarantee the liquidation of the large estate owners in the villages because this has always been a bastion of reaction and fascism in our country and was one of the main sources of aggression and the wars of conquest against other peoples”.²⁶

Whereas these comments were dominated by verbal insults directed at the Junkers, and hence the nobility as a whole, the communist brochure

²⁴ “Bodenreform”, *Neue Zeit*, 31.08.1945, cited in: Dieter Felbick, *Schlagwörter der Nachkriegszeit 1945–1949* (Berlin, 2003), p. 134.

²⁵ “Für beschleunigte Bodenreform – Aufruf der antifaschistischen Parteien und Gewerkschaften” Durchführungsverordnung 45, 054, 03 vom 5.9.1945, cited in: Felbick, *Schlagwörter der Nachkriegszeit 1945–1949*, p. 352.

²⁶ Decree on Land Reform in Land Saxony, Landesverwaltung Sachsen, Nachrichten, 24 September 1945, in: Beate Ruhm von Oppen (ed.), *Documents on Germany under Occupation 1945–1954* (London, 1955), p. 59.

Junkerland in Bauernhand went even further by stigmatising individual families. "Those were the Kapp-putschists: the Schwerins, Brandensteins, Oertzens and Schulenburgs [...] [who] ever since, had supplied the reactionary militarists as well as, in our time, the higher SS-leaders and the murderers of suppressed peoples."²⁷

Yet, this widespread condemnation of the Junkers from party organs and newspapers in the Soviet Occupation Zone did not come as a surprise. The bourgeoisie and landed elites had always been the class enemy of the communist ideology, and the treatment of the Russian nobility during the 1917 revolution had served as precedence for the treatment of the East-Elbian nobility. This unique situation of paramount political control under the auspices of the Red Army, paired with an almost entirely discouraged nobility, encouraged the provisional government to discredit and destroy the remnants of the old elites once and for all.

This moral condemnation of the Junkers seems to have been pervasive in Western Germany too. In an article published in *Die Zeit* in 1948, Ernst Friedländer implied that following the war, "the Junkers a priori had been suspected of having been especially closely related to National Socialism" and "every nobleman" was automatically defamed as "Junker".²⁸ A similar assessment was reported by a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, who wrote in the summer of 1945 that "there seems already to be a general desire

²⁷ *Junkerland in Bauernhand*, cited in: Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 425.

²⁸ Der Fehlstart, *Die Zeit*, 04.03.1948.

that the allies should deal ruthlessly with high party officials, Junkers, industrialists and diplomatists who escaped to the West".²⁹

Although the defamations in the west never reached the dimensions of those in the SOZ, the pre-existing domestic reservations, as shown above, were further fuelled by the prejudiced reaction of the Western Allies. In a control council directive from January 1946, the Allies specifically demanded the removal from office of all people who could be linked to "Prussian Junker tradition". "Information as to any individual, however, which shows him to have been a member of an aristocratic Prussian or East Prussian, Pomeranian, Silesian or Mecklenburg family [...] should be given careful consideration. Such individuals are likely to merit removal by exclusion as they are likely to perpetuate the German militaristic traditions."³⁰ Along these lines, the American denazification questionnaire explicitly demanded every German adult to "list all titles of nobility ever held by you or your wife or by the parents or grandparents of either of you".³¹ This practice, as Giles McDonogh has pointed out, suggested that antiquity of lineage was "synonymous with political unreliability". The Junkers, in particular, were accused of having "helped in Hitler's rise to power".³² This conviction also

²⁹ Jobs for Hitler's Opponents, Our Special Correspondent, *Manchester Guardian*, 12.06.1945.

³⁰ Extracts from control council directive no 24: Removal from office and from positions of responsibility of Nazis and of persons hostile to allied purposes, in: Oppen (ed.), *Documents on Germany*, p. 102.

³¹ Kurt Düwell, War Criminals, Denazification and the Treatment of SED Functionaries: A Comparative Approach to Make Some Distinctions, in: Norbert Finzsch and Jürgen Martschukat (eds), *Different Restorations, Reconstruction and "Wiederaufbau" in the United States and Germany 1865–1945–1989* (Providence, 1996), p. 194.

³² Giles McDonogh, *After the Reich: From the Liberation of Vienna to the Berlin Airlift* (London, 2007), p. 347.

found expression in the severe verdicts of many early denazification trials. As Jonathan Petropoulos has pointed out, the punishments tended to be more severe in this early phase, because “both the Allies and the indigenous German authorities in the West sought to send a message about the pernicious influence of the old elite”.³³

These anti-Junker sentiments on the part of the Allies, however, were by no means solely a product of the Second World War. On the contrary, the Allies could draw on an intellectually highly distinguished tradition of anti-Junkerism that dated back to the eve of the First World War.³⁴ An in-depth analysis of this, however, would exceed the framework of this chapter. Yet, it bears noting that there were various key essays that unequivocally demanded the elimination of the Junkers as a group wielding political influence, published years before the Second World War had concluded, which certainly influenced later policy making of the Allies in Germany.

There are a few threads of criticism which most of these writings have in common, such as the allegation that the Junkers “have been the authors or co-authors of all the acts of aggression perpetrated by Germany in the last seventy or eighty years”³⁵ culminating in their conspiracy “with Hindenburg

³³ Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich*, p. 336.

³⁴ See: especially Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1915). Also see the numerous speeches of the American union leader Eugene Debs, who frequently condemned the Junkers as warmongers. Eugene V. Debs, The Canton Ohio Anti-War Speech, 16.06.1918, reprinted in: *Socialist Viewpoint*, 3:3 (2003), online at: http://www.socialistviewpoint.org/march_03/mar_03_26.html.

³⁵ Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy*, p. 173.

to make Hitler Chancellor of the Reich".³⁶ Furthermore the Junkers were accused of being "a caste imprisoned in its own archaic economy and social system",³⁷ "a group which always has been prepared to sacrifice the peace of the world for 'the grand agrarian alchemy' of high grain prices".³⁸ As a result, these writers claimed, it was imperative to prevent the Junkers "from seizing their former positions of strategic political power in the German state".³⁹ If this crucial warning were not heeded, there would be "every possibility that the history of the Weimar Republic would repeat itself and a Vendée in the east will again be found waiting for an opportunity to overthrow democracy".⁴⁰

This sharp Junker-critique went hand in hand with continuous anti-Junker commentaries in the leading Allied newspapers of the time, which further undermined the Junkers' reputation at home and abroad. In March 1946, the *World Federation of Trade Unions'* recommendation of a "prompt breaking up of the great landed estates" to ensure the "destruction of the economic basis of the Junkers" was given considerable media attention.⁴¹ *The Times*, especially concerned with the demilitarisation of Germany, also demanded "the breaking up of [...] the Junker class, from which the officer class of the

³⁶ Griswold, The Junkers: Hostages to the Past, in: *Virginia Quarterly Review*, online at: <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/junkers-hostages-past>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy*, p. 173

³⁹ Mellen, The German People and the Postwar World, in: *The American Political Science Review*, p. 625.

⁴⁰ Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy*, p. 176

⁴¹ De-nazification of German Industry: Demands of Trade Unions' Mission, *Manchester Guardian*, 22.03.1946.

Reich had been so largely drawn".⁴² Along these lines, the *Manchester Guardian*, in its commentary on the cession of East Prussia in 1947, which it called "the stronghold of the Junkers, the most Nazi of all the Nazi provinces of Germany",⁴³ explicitly renewed the association of East Prussia, Junkers and Nazis, and thus clearly furthered the pre-existing prejudices and prejudgments against this caste.

In 1956, Walter Görlitz very eloquently summarised the Junkers' reputation through his assessment that "in Germany, they were accused of having ruined the peasantry, having been advocates of regression as well as militarism. Abroad, they were accused of having been the noblest advocates of Germany's pursuit of global power status and, last but not least, for having helped Hitler into power to once more hazard the grand gamble for the Reich's supremacy, at least in Europe".⁴⁴ Considering these critical comments, it becomes apparent that after the war, the East-Elbian nobility's reputation reached at an all-time low. Through virtually all ranks of society, at home and abroad, the nobility was seen as having squandered its remaining reserves of legitimacy by entering into a collaborative relationship with the National Socialist regime.

⁴² Germany after the War, *The Times* (London), 10.02.1945.

⁴³ "Polish East Prussia" – Not One of Poland's Show-Places, *Manchester Guardian*, 21.08.1947.

⁴⁴ Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. IX.

The Adelsblatt: the Thoughts of a Bewildered Caste

The early post-war period saw a significant withdrawal of the nobility into private life. The majority of the Prussian landed elites had not only lost their political influence, but had also been expelled from their estates in eastern Germany, their last remaining vestiges of power. The establishment of a workers' and peasants' state in the residual heartland of Prussia had led to their complete expropriation, and the vast majority had fled to the occupation zones of the Western Allies. Destitute and publicly condemned, many nobles sought refuge among their peers. In these days, the re-established in-house newspaper of the nobility, the *Adelsblatt*, served as an important tool of inter-noble communication.⁴⁵ As early as October 1945, Jürgen von Flotow and Hans Friedrich von Ehrenkrook set up the newspaper as an attempt to channel the noble refugee lists and coordinate the re-conflation of noble families that had been dispersed by the war.⁴⁶ By the late 1940s, the newspaper had begun publishing articles by noble authors.

Since the *Adelsblatt* was set up as a medium for inter-noble communication – and not as an instrument for exerting influence on public opinion – the following testimonies give significant insight into the thoughts of a bewildered social elite. Reading the articles published in this organ, one is

⁴⁵ Jürgen von Flotow (ed.), *Deutsches Adelsblatt, Mitteilungsblatt der Vereinigung der deutschen Adelsverbände* (Marburg).

⁴⁶ Initially Flotow and Ehrenkrook called the newspaper “Adelsarchiv”, presumably to distance themselves from the former in-house newspaper of the staunchly pro-Nazi “Adelsgenossenschaft”. In 1962, it was eventually renamed “Deutsches Adelsblatt”. In the text of this thesis, I will refer to it simply as “Adelsblatt”. See: Institut Deutsche Adelsforschung, Kulturgeschichtliche Bibliographie zum Adelsblatt, online at: <http://home.foni.net/~adelsforschung1/kubib00.htm>.

struck by the intensity of the self-deception, the delusions of grandeur, and the immunity to self-doubt. Although it is difficult to assess how representative these accounts are of the nobility as a whole, they certainly suggest a widespread misapprehension of the actual realities. Widely ignoring the fact that their centuries-old supremacy was not just in jeopardy, but had in reality, come to a definitive end, the articles are animated by a determination to retrieve lost status, and the appeal to fellow-noblemen to maintain the collective claim to social leadership.

Pointing to the century-old history of the nobility, Otto von Harling remarked, “ever since the late middle ages, the nobility again and again had to master crises in which its existence was threatened or appeared to have become superfluous. Nevertheless, there always followed a new generation which thrived especially as a result of the changed conditions”.⁴⁷ Kurt Rüdert von Collenberg also appealed to the historic endurance of the nobility when he declared, “one can observe with pride, that the majority of the displaced nobility of the east, defied fate with clenched teeth and survived the extremely difficult challenges they faced. Innumerable are the examples of heroic self-assertion”.⁴⁸ The journalist Hans Georg von Studnitz not only praised inter-noble solidarity during the aftermath of the war, but also claimed that the horrors of war and expulsion had led to a new noble awareness of life. At the same time, however, he repeatedly demanded of his peers an incessant “consciousness of our uniqueness”; a uniqueness he

⁴⁷ Otto von Harling, *Adel und Elite*, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Juni 1955, p. 105.

⁴⁸ Kurt Freiherr Rüdert von Collenberg-Bödighheim, *Der Adel im heutigen Westdeutschland*, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, April 1955, p. 64.

ascribed to the nobility due to their purportedly being the traditional and sole remaining stronghold of moral values and cultural traditions.⁴⁹

Leadership, righteousness, modesty and self-criticism were also attributes Hans-Joachim von Merkatz demanded from his peers. According to him, all these traditionally noble virtues had vanished from modern society, and it was thus once more the nobility's task to ensure the survival of a "moral Germany".⁵⁰ Freiherr von B. drew a similar conclusion by indirectly suggesting that the complete downfall of Germany in 1945 was owed to the disempowerment of the nobility in 1918. To him, the absence of strict social hierarchies were the roots of the eventual catastrophe. Without the nobility, he claimed, the German population was inevitably transformed into "animalistic masses" and hence could only survive if the nobility once again aspired to leadership.⁵¹

The authors of the noble in-house newspaper seemed to have utterly misunderstood the developments of the previous decade. Still entangled in their belief in noble superiority, they attempted to reassert an entirely outdated and supposedly hereditary claim for leadership. The collapse of 1945, however, in a sense represented the debacle of the effort launched in both world wars to establish – albeit under very different auspices – German hegemony. In both these wars, the nobility had been a prominent constituent of the decision-making elite. From the standpoint of the nobility's reputation,

⁴⁹ Hans Georg von Studnitz, Was wir uns bewahrt haben, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Dezember 1950, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Hans-Joachim von Merkatz, Die Aufgabe des europäischen Adels in unserer Zeit, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Juli 1955 pp. 122–125.

⁵¹ Freiherr von B., Leserbrief, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, February 1951, p. 20.

there was thus a cumulative dimension to the predicament of 1945. Under these conditions, simply reasserting the traditional claim to leadership or pressing for a return to 'traditional' social values was inexpedient, if not obsolete. In order to regenerate self-belief and rebuild the respect of others, the nobility was now challenged to focus on its image management skills and become "masters of memory".⁵² After all, as Heinrich Heine put it, "God, the Devil and the nobility only exist if they are believed in".⁵³

The Minting of a New Coin: Nobility and Resistance

The deep and inherent desire to survive this reputational slump and remain at the apex of society required the nobility to make strategic use of the entire spectrum of its social, cultural and symbolic capital to compensate as much as possible for the irrevocable loss of its political, social and material power.⁵⁴ The most evident opportunity to reinforce the nobility's claim to leadership and uniqueness in the post-war years was a close association with the growing myth of the military resistance. The indisputably high share of noblemen involved in the conspiracy offered a unique chance to firmly locate the nobility on the right side of history, far removed from the criminality of the regime.

⁵² The term is borrowed from the eponymous article by Stephan Malinowski and Markus Funck, *Masters of Memory: The Strategic Use of Autobiographical Memory by the German Nobility*, in: Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory. New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 86–89.

⁵³ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 47.

⁵⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Volume 5 – Bundesrepublik und DDR 1949–1990* (Munich, 2008), p. 168.

The initial popular identification of nobility and resistance had already been established by the anti-noble tirades in the immediate aftermath of the failed plot. In a way, this narrative – albeit under reverse auspices – found its way into the post-war era, and the odium of treason was gradually replaced by an odium of heroism.⁵⁵ As consequence, the anti-Nazi resistance that culminated in the attempted coup of 20 July 1944 has been, and largely still is, perceived as a noble revolt.⁵⁶

The nobility itself, or rather individual noblemen and -women, significantly contributed to this perception. As early as 1948, Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz, a former member of the Kreisau Circle and founding member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) after the war, stated somewhat consternated in his manifesto about the *Tragedy of Prussiandom* that “the nobility had been pressured so far that only one solution remained feasible, a solution which, given its posture and traditions, seemed to be entirely inappropriate: coup and assassination”.⁵⁷ In a memorial service for the victims of the failed coup in 1954, Paul Graf Yorck von Wartenburg especially highlighted “the numerous bearers of old historic names [...] who were driven by the desire to atone through self-sacrifice”.⁵⁸ Similarly, Kurt

⁵⁵ For the transformation of the military resistance’s reputation in post-war Germany, see chapter I of this thesis.

⁵⁶ Conze, *Adel und Adeligkeit im Widerstand*, in: Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, p. 269.

⁵⁷ Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz, *Die Tragik des Preußentums*, in: Rudolf Pechel (ed.), *Deutsche Rundschau*, 69, 2:5 (1946), p. 119.

⁵⁸ Paul Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, *Erbe und Verantwortung*, Rede am 20. Juli 1954 in der Universität Heidelberg, online at: www.20-juli-44.de/reden/.

Rüdt von Collenberg emphasised the “exceptional dimensions of the nobility’s involvement in the coup”.⁵⁹

At another large memorial service in Munich, Walter von Cube, the provisional director of the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation, went even further when he transfigured the conspiracy into “the last rebellion of the German nobility”.⁶⁰ The revolt of 20 July was not carried out by the masses, but rather by – and it is here where the word evokes its full potential – an ‘elite’. An elite, which had once determined what – in the best sense – should be labelled “Prussian”. Its list is a distressing and proud collection of historic families: Bernstorff, Dohna, Kleist, Moltke, Oertzen, Schulenburg, Schwerin, Tresckow, Uexküll, and Yorck.⁶¹

Most influential among noble writers, however, was the publicist Marion Gräfin Dönhoff. Born into one of the most prominent and powerful families of East Prussia, Dönhoff received the traditional education of a privileged and wealthy member of the Prussian nobility. Following her *Abitur* in Berlin in 1928, she went on to study economics in Frankfurt. Deeply disturbed by the anti-Semitic excesses of the regime after the seizure of power, she left Frankfurt for Basel and received her doctorate in 1935. Following the outbreak of the war and the draft of her brothers, she effectively took over

⁵⁹ Kurt Freiherr Rüdt von Collenberg-Bödighheim, *Der Adel im heutigen Westdeutschland*, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, April 1955, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Walter von Cube, *Rebellion des deutschen Adels*, Rede von Rundfunkintendant Walter von Cube am 20. Juli 1954 im Herkulessaal der Residenz, Munich, online at: www.20-juli-44.de/reden/.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the management of the paternal estates at the beginning of the war.⁶² During those days, she maintained close relations with many future members of the coup against Hitler. Although she was never actively engaged in the conspiracy itself, she had been in close contact with members of the military resistance, as well as the Kreisau Circle, of whose ideas Peter Count Yorck von Wartenburg closely informed her. She also occasionally acted as a courier for sensitive information between the Goerdeler Circle in Berlin and her close childhood friend, Heinrich Count Lehndorff, who served as liaison officer of the military resistance in East Prussia.⁶³

The fact that she, however, never appeared on any list for any future deployment, ultimately saved her life in the aftermath of 20 July 1944. The invasion of the Red Army in early 1945, and the subsequent wave of expulsions from East Prussia, brought an end not only to the war, but also to her life as an East Prussian squires. Her experience of loss was twofold. On the one hand, she had lost numerous close friends from within the resistance movement. On the other, she had also lost her cherished East Prussian *Heimat*,⁶⁴ which she was forced to flee by horseback in January 1945. This

⁶² Christian Graf von Krockow, *Porträts berühmter deutscher Frauen: Von Königin Luise bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2001), p. 357.

⁶³ There has been some debate over the years as to her level of involvement and how much she actually knew. See: Fritz J. Raddatz, *Unruhestifter* (Munich, 2003), p. 359; Haug von Kuenheim, *Marion Dönhoff* (Hamburg, 1999), pp. 26–37; Eckart Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels – Marion Gräfin Dönhoff und das Bild des Widerstands gegen den Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 51:4 (2003), pp. 488, 489; Paul Stauffer, *„Sechs furchtbare Jahre ...“: auf den Spuren Carl Jakob Burckhardts durch den Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Zürich, 1998), pp. 304–310.

⁶⁴ The word *Heimat* is used to explain a place (sometimes also a landscape) where a person is born. A place which shapes a person's identity, character, mentality, attitude and general approach towards life.

twofold experience of loss was to become the dominant theme of her post-war career in journalism.⁶⁵

Marion Dönhoff's first attempts to transfigure the conspiracy into a revolt of the Prussian landed elites came in close conjunction to similar attempts by her former Professor and long-time family friend, Edgar Salin. "Like a well-trained 'Pas de deux'", as the historian Ulrich Raulff has described it, "they flew over the terrain of an only just awakening *Geschichtspolitik*".⁶⁶ As a result of a series of articles published within the span of a few years, the idea that 20 July 1944 had in fact been a revolt of the nobility was carefully planted in the public mind. Born in Frankfurt in 1892 to Jewish parents, Salin studied economics and philosophy before starting an academic career at the University of Heidelberg. There he became a member of the George Circle, a loose organisation of young aspiring intellectuals gathered around the prophetic poet Stefan George, who had propagated the establishment of a "New Reich" ruled by a hierarchical system of a new "spiritual nobility".⁶⁷ Through this experience, Salin was also closely acquainted with Claus and Berthold von Stauffenberg, two of the key figures of the plot. Both men had been ardent disciples of George, and allegedly often referred to the conspiracy movement – in honour of Stefan George's eponymous poem – as "Secret Germany".⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 489.

⁶⁶ Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister – Stefan Georges Nachleben* (Munich, 2009), p. 420.

⁶⁷ See: Stefan George, *Das neue Reich*, Volume 9 (Stuttgart, 2001).

⁶⁸ Edgar Salin firstly made this claim in the second edition of his memoirs of the George Circle in 1954: Edgar Salin, *Um Stefan George. Erinnerung und Zeugnis* (Munich, 1954), p. 324.

Inspired by these close friendships and the desire to transfigure the conspiracy into a movement based on George's idea of "a revolt of the German spirit", Salin came to the literary rescue of the plot as early as April 1945.⁶⁹ Therein he informed his readers that not all Germans had been willing executioners; numerous people, from all parts of society, had been persecuted because of resistant activities. However, he felt further obliged to particularly emphasise the exceptional resistance of the old nobility, specifically the East-Prussian nobility, thereby openly paying homage to his close friend, Marion Dönhoff. "The old heartland – East Prussia – contained, throughout the Third Reich, an upright and cohesive opposition."⁷⁰

In this context, one might recall that Salin was speaking of the nobility of a region in which the NSDAP had gained 56 percent of the popular vote in the last semi-free elections of 1933,⁷¹ and whose ranks were heavily interspersed with vehement National Socialists like Hermann Count Dohna-Finckenstein, Konrad Count Finckenstein-Schönberg, and even Marion Dönhoff's brother, Christoph Count Dönhoff.⁷² Particularly in predominantly agricultural East Prussia, where the loyalty between peasant and landlord had hardly diminished despite the official abolition of the nobility in 1919, the public association of powerful nobles with the emerging new regime proved to be a crucial factor in the National Socialist ascent to power. Hence, to speak of an "upright and cohesive" opposition in East Prussia either betrayed complete

⁶⁹ Edgar Salin, *Die deutschen Katakomben*, in: *Schweizer Annalen*, 2 (1945), p. 89.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 88.

⁷¹ Heinrich August Winkler: *Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 884–888.

⁷² Malinowski und Reichardt, *Die Reihen fest geschlossen? Adelige im Führerkorps der SA bis 1934*, in: Conze und Wienfort (eds), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 142.

ignorance, which is unlikely in the case of this highly distinguished academic, or represented a deliberate effort to exculpate an entire social class by means of enhancing its public image, an effort reinforced by the author's close friendship with Dönhoff.

Only months later, Marion Dönhoff picked up on Salin's efforts to place the nobility at the centre of the plot. In her account *In Memoriam 20 Juli 1944*, which she wrote in the summer of 1945, Dönhoff concluded that "the actual spiritual initiative and volitional leadership had been placed in the hands of a younger generation such as Count Stauffenberg, Fritz von der Schulenburg, Adam von Trott zu Solz, Peter Count York and Helmuth Count Moltke who all descended from the landed nobility".⁷³

Only a year later, Edgar Salin once again picked up the ball. In an article published in 1946 under the title *Die Tragödie der deutschen Gegenrevolution*, he elevated the noble conspirators to actors of collective atonement: "all the historic guilt that had accrued to the nobility throughout the Bismarckian and Wilhelmine era as well as in the early years of the Third Reich", he argued, was overshadowed by the "atoning sacrifice of men like Stauffenberg, Yorck, Schulenburg, Lehdorff, Schwerin, Moltke and many of their friends".⁷⁴ To put the icing on the cake, Salin continued his praise, stating, "ever since the famous night in August 1789, in which the French

⁷³ Marion Dönhoff, *In Memoriam 20. Juli 1944*, private print 1946; also published in Pechel, *Deutscher Widerstand*, pp. 183–198, for above citation see pp. 191, 192.

⁷⁴ This article for the first time appeared in Switzerland in 1946: Edgar Salin, *Die Tragödie der deutschen Gegenrevolution*, in: *Schweizer Annalen*, 12 (1946), pp. 719–729; In 1948, it was published in Germany: Edgar Salin, *Die Tragödie der deutschen Gegenrevolution*, in: Hans-Joachim Schoeps (ed.), *Zeitschrift für Religion und Geistesgeschichte*, 3 (1948), pp. 193–206, for above citation see p. 206.

nobility renounced its hereditary rights, no social class in its entirety has ever proven a comparable, heroic power of sacrifice".⁷⁵ Hence, these writings serve not only as an attempt to monopolise the military resistance as a noble revolt, but also as a conspicuous effort to use the act of a few to exculpate an entire class. Certainly, one must recognise the traditional and unquestionable will to sacrifice among the Prussian nobility, which once again was fully displayed during the downfall of the Wehrmacht at the end of the Second World War, with more than 8000 victims among the nobility.⁷⁶ The nobility clearly rose to the occasion and, as practised throughout centuries, did not hesitate to honour its oath to its ruler. This time, however, this ruler was not the Prussian king, but Adolf Hitler, whose reign had not only led to immeasurable war crimes, but also to crimes against humanity on a scale previously unheard of.

Had Salin merely referred to the nobility's willingness to sacrifice itself for its country, he would have been describing something approximating historical reality. But the notion that the resistance represented a heroic act of sacrifice in the name of "an entire social caste" was not only far-fetched, but rather, a direct distortion of history. Perhaps Salin had forgotten the words of Prince Adolf zu Bentheim-Tecklenburg, Marshal of the German Noble Association (DAG) at the time of the plot – and thus much more a representative of the 'entire' nobility than Stauffenberg, Moltke and Schulenburg – who

⁷⁵ Salin, *Die Tragödie der deutschen Gegenrevolution*, in: *Religion und Geistesgeschichte*, p. 206.

⁷⁶ Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 408.

immediately after the failed coup, felt obliged to express his deepest abhorrence for the “ruthless felony” of the conspirators.⁷⁷

By the time Salin published his second article in 1946, Marion Dönhoff had already joined the new aspiring newspaper, *Die Zeit*, in Hamburg, which was to become the principal outlet of her literary defence of the military resistance. At the time, however, *Die Zeit* was staunchly conservative, “right of centre, right of the CDU and ostentatiously national”.⁷⁸ Its layout displayed striking parallels with the *Reich*, the principal former intellectual newspaper of the Third Reich. Following the spirit of the time, there was hardly any critical engagement with National Socialism. Instead, the *Die Zeit* became prominent for resolutely railing against the occupational authorities. Authors like Hans-Georg von Studnitz, “a staunch advocate of National Socialism until the very end of the Third Reich, member of the press corps of the Foreign Office, employee of the Security Service (SD) and author of vehemently anti-Semitic articles”,⁷⁹ especially shaped the perception of the newspaper in those days. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Die Zeit* became something of a refuge for authors compromised by their involvement with the Nazi regime.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Adolf Fürst zu Bentheim-Tecklenburg-Rheda, Stellungnahme der Deutschen Adelsgenossenschaft zum Attentat vom 20 Juli 1944, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Juli 1944, p. 50.

⁷⁸ Axel Schildt, Immer mit der Zeit, in: Christian Haase und Axel Schildt (eds), *Die Zeit und die Bonner Republik* (Göttingen, 2008), p. 14.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

⁸⁰ See: Der Mann der bei der Zeit Ernst Krüger war, *Die Zeit*, 26.04.2012.

In those early years as a journalist, Dönhoff only occasionally intervened in the public debate surrounding the military resistance.⁸¹ Yet, when she did, nurturing the narrative of a noble plot was almost always at the centre of her argument. In the light of the Hedler and Remer trials in 1952, the public debate centred on the question of whether or not the conspirators had committed high treason.⁸² From Dönhoff's perspective, this debate led to a perception which was too narrowly focused on the military aspect of the conspiracy. "People pretend as if the whole thing was exclusively an affair of career officers."⁸³ Such a view, she feared, detracted the attention from the ones who, in her eyes, were really responsible, and hence she reproachfully remarked: "who still remembers today that almost all grand names of Prussian history were represented among the executed men – not as soldiers but as high-ranking civil servants or independent civilians? Nobody!"⁸⁴

In 1954, Dönhoff, after explicitly criticising the increasingly nationalist approach of the newspaper, left her desk to join the *Observer* in London.⁸⁵ By the time she returned in 1955, the publisher Gerd Bucerius had forced out the majority of the politically compromised journalists. Dönhoff was promoted

⁸¹ Auflehnung gegen den Helden, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1952; Das Bild des Menschen, *Die Zeit*, 23.07.1953; Das Gewissen steht auf, *Die Zeit*, 15.07.1954.

⁸² See the section *20 July 1944 in Court* in chapter I of this thesis.

⁸³ Auflehnung gegen den Helden, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1952.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In the summer of 1954, the staunchly nationalistic editor in chief of *Die Zeit*, Richard Tüngel, published an article from the former NS expert in constitutional law, Carl Schmitt. This was too much for Marion Dönhoff. "Who preached the spirit of National Socialism or controlled the terminology of the press, shall forever be excluded from a political newspaper such as ours." Tüngel, however, did not respond to Dönhoff's request, which in return prompted her immediate departure. See: Der Mann der bei der Die Zeit Ernst Krüger war, *Die Zeit*, 26.04.2012.

to deputy editor-in-chief and began to reshape and reposition the newspaper, transforming it into one of the most reputable venues of liberal journalism in Germany. She used the anniversaries – not only the round ones – to cement the legacy of the men of 20 July 1944, and turned *Die Zeit* into the primary journalistic voice of the commemoration of the military resistance.⁸⁶ Her articles were often prominently placed on the front cover or the political section of the paper.

In the middle of the 1960s, Dönhoff's commitment to the commemoration of the resistance intensified even further. Now she also addressed the topic in various publications beyond *Die Zeit*. What is striking about her work is that all these biographical or personal descriptions were exclusively limited to nobles. In 1952, she accounted for Albrecht Graf von Bernstorff's role in the resistance against Hitler.⁸⁷ In 1957, she published a long report about Claus Graf von Stauffenberg.⁸⁸ Her first bestseller, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, in 1962, included a lengthy portrayal of her childhood friend, Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff.⁸⁹ The involvement of her good friend, Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, also received individual treatment in a lengthy article in 1976.⁹⁰ Most prominent among her pieces focussing on the noble elements of the conspiracy, however, featured in her memorial book *Um der Ehre Willen* –

⁸⁶ Der Name Stauffenberg, *Die Zeit*, 25.07.1957; Heusingers Tagesbefehl, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1959; Es fehlt nicht an Vorbildern, *Die Zeit*, 17.07.1964; Die Botschaft des Gewissens. Dreißig Jahre danach: Gedenken an die Männer des 20. Juli, *Die Zeit*, 19.07.1974; Verschwörer gegen das Unrecht. Gedanken zum 20. Juli 1944, *Die Zeit*, 20.07.1984.

⁸⁷ Marion Dönhoff, De nobilitate, in: Elly Gräfin von Reventlow (ed.) *Albrecht Bernstorff zum Gedächtnis* (Altenhof, 1952).

⁸⁸ Der Name Stauffenberg, *Die Zeit*, 25.07.1957.

⁸⁹ Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt* (Düsseldorf, 1962), pp. 81–94.

⁹⁰ Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Menschen, die wissen, worum es geht* (Hamburg, 1976), pp. 15–36.

Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli in 1994, which consisted of seven detailed portrayals of noble conspirators.⁹¹

To a certain degree, this behaviour can surely be explained by Dönhoff's social background and her friendships with the noble conspirators. However, in these articles, Dönhoff portrayed the Prussian nobility as uniquely predestined to resist. She transformed these noblemen into preordained exponents of the Prussian virtues, the last pillars of chivalry in Germany's darkest hour.⁹² "We were all about the same age", she recounts in her book, published 1994, "[...] all came from a rural milieu in which continuity, responsibility for the community, honour, duty and a certain austerity formed the pillars of our lifestyle."⁹³ It was this deeply inherent "chivalrous attitude" of the noble conspirators, which, in her eyes, served as the historical prerequisite of 20 July 1944.

From Marwitz to Stauffenberg: How President Heuss Established a Link between Resistance and Nobility

The entire process of aligning the nobility with the military resistance and thereby establishing a positive narrative of the nobility's role in the Third Reich was also made possible by the deliberate efforts of the government, especially in the 1950s, to incorporate the military resistance into the founding myth of the Federal Republic of Germany. It was recognised that

⁹¹ Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre Willen – Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli in 1994* (Berlin, 1994).

⁹² Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 497.

⁹³ Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre Willen*, p. 186.

the resistance of the elites, among which the nobility played a prominent role, represented a “better Germany”.⁹⁴ The foundation of the FRG four years after the conclusion of the war in some ways ensured a vitally needed dissociation from the regime and therefore allowed for a ‘clean’ start of the new republic.⁹⁵ The perception of a morally intact Germany, embodied by the victims of the failed plot, helped to build a bridge over the horrors and crimes of the Third Reich and link the young republic to the democratic traditions of Weimar.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the government actively promoted the gradual political and social re-integration of the nobility into the newly established democracy. The FRG’s clear commitment to freedom of property, in times when noble families were strategically expelled and expropriated in the German Democratic Republic, significantly increased the nobility’s commitment to integration.⁹⁷ The introduction of financial compensation for expropriated property in the East in 1951 – known as the *Equalisation of Burdens Law* – not only facilitated the nobility’s identification with the economic foundations of the newly founded state, but also often saved noble families from complete poverty.⁹⁸ Additionally, the openly propagated anti-communism of the

⁹⁴ See especially chapter I of this thesis.

⁹⁵ Conze, *Von Deutschem Adel*, pp. 167–170.

⁹⁶ Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 497.

⁹⁷ Conze, *Von Deutschem Adel*, pp. 166–169.

⁹⁸ See: Michael L. Hughes, *Shouldering the burdens of defeat. West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Lothar F. Neumann und Klaus Schaper, *Die Sozialordnung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 2008), see especially chapter 10.3, Lastenausgleich und Eingliederung, pp. 281–285; Michael Schwartz, Lastenausgleich: Ein Problem der Vertriebenen im doppelten Deutschland, in: Marita Krauss (ed.), *Integrationen – Vertriebene in den deutschen Ländern nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2008), pp. 167–193.

government had a considerably reassuring effect on this highly insecure and anxious caste. For decades, the nobility's abhorrence of communism had predominately been shaped by the lurid tales of the Russian revolution and the atrocities which had been inflicted on their Baltic peers. Flight and expulsion, which the majority had experienced first-hand, raised this noble anti-communism to new heights.⁹⁹

Most important among these efforts, however, was the government's explicit official recognition of the nobility's outstanding share in the conspiracy. This acknowledgement was prominently expressed by Theodor Heuss, the president of the FRG, at the ten-year anniversary of the failed coup, in 1954. In his commemorative speech, Heuss framed the resistance movement as an amalgamation of the "Christian nobility of the German nation with the leaders of the socialists [and] the unionists".¹⁰⁰ Perhaps equally important: he established a link to a longstanding tradition of righteous resistance among the East-Elbian nobility by relating the behaviour of the men of 20 July 1944 to the disobedience of Johann Friedrich von der Marwitz during the Seven Years' War. Against the explicit order of Frederick the Great, von der Marwitz had refused to plunder the estate of the Saxon minister of state, remarking that such behaviour would be unbefitting to an officer of his majesty.¹⁰¹ Such prominent appreciation from the highest representative of the government was ground breaking for the public perception of the

⁹⁹ Eckart Conze, *Edelmann als Bürger?*, in: Hettling und Ulrich (eds), *Bürgertum nach 1945*, p. 360.

¹⁰⁰ Heuss, *Der 20. Juli 1944*, Ansprache des Bundespräsidenten am 19 Juli 1954.

¹⁰¹ Marwitz is quoted with the following words: "In such cases one might use a mercenary officer, but not the commander of His Majesty's Gendarmes": See: Theodor Fontane, *Das Oderland, Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg II* (Berlin, 2014), p. 174.

nobility's role in the Third Reich, and whether he intended to or not, Heuss practically re-ennobled the East-Elbian nobility under the auspices of the Republic.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, one can only speculate as to Heuss' motivations for coming to the rescue of the nobility in this way. Unlike other leading politicians, Heuss generally drafted his speeches himself and did not rely on any substantial external input.¹⁰³ One possible reason for his attitude might have been the influence of his wife, Elly Heuss-Knapp, whose mother descended from an old Georgian noble family.¹⁰⁴ More likely, however, Heuss was driven by the desire to commemorate his various friends among the conspirators, which included men like Hans Bernd and Werner von Haeften, as well as Albrecht Graf von Bernstorff.¹⁰⁵ His close friendship with Bernstorff, a former member of the Foreign Office and resolute opponent of the Nazis, seems to have been

¹⁰² Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 498.

¹⁰³ See the comments of Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, one of the leading staff of the Federal President's Office at the time: "For us, the staff of the Federal President's Office, Heuss was (...) a very pleasant boss, since he personally drafted his speeches. (...) We went to look for punch lines and ideas, but that was all we contributed to his speeches." Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, *Von Adenauer zu Brandt* (Berlin, 1990), pp. 102, 103.

¹⁰⁴ See: Theodor Heuss' letter to Dr. Klaus Mehnert on 23 September 1958, in: Theodor Heuss, *Der Bundespräsident: Briefe 1954–1959*, Ernst Wolfgang Becker, Martin Vogt, Wolfram Werner (eds.), (Berlin, 2012), p. 478.

¹⁰⁵ See the comments of Heuss' personal assistant, Hans Bott, who referred to these friendships as motivation to commemorate the military resistance in a letter to Georg Schwarz, in: Theodor Heuss, *Der Bundespräsident: Briefe 1949–1954*, Ernst Wolfgang Becker, Martin Vogt, Wolfram Werner (eds.) (Berlin, 2012), p. 558.

formative in this context, particularly as he also wrote a lengthy preface to a memorial booklet in honour of Albrecht von Bernstorff in 1962.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Forging a close alignment with the military resistance proved to be a crucial step in the nobility's post-war history management. This was the pivotal stepping-stone towards the reconstruction of the nobility's shattered image after the war. It distanced the nobility from the machinations of the Nazi regime and established a positive and lasting narrative of its role during the Third Reich. It also helped the nobility to establish a viable public identity within the new democratic Germany by allowing it to become part of the 'other', morally intact Germany. It was a counterweight of great value to the accusation that the nobility had been the gravedigger of the Weimar Republic, and it helped to allay the lasting hostility towards the old Junker elite.¹⁰⁷

Overall, this entire process was carefully steered by a select group of noblemen and -women who, at an early stage, had realised the enormous benefits a strategic alignment with the military resistance might yield. Significantly aided by leading representatives of the government, the perception that 20 July 1944 had, in fact, been a revolt of the nobility, gradually found its way into collective memory. By 1969, this perception had

¹⁰⁶ Kurt von Stutterheim, *Die Majestät des Gewissens. In Memoriam Albrecht Bernstorff* (Hamburg, 1962); For Heuss's friendship with Bernstorff see: Theodor Heuss, *In der Defensive – Briefe 1933–1945*, Elke Seefried (ed.) (Munich, 2009), p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 497.

found so much acceptance that at the official memorial service of the government at the Bendlerblock – the main site of the failed plot in Berlin – when the renowned writer Carl Zuckmayer proclaimed that “almost all names of the German nobility were to be found among the resistance” against Hitler, no objections were raised.¹⁰⁸ The fact that almost every East-Elbian noble family had been prominently represented within the NSDAP or other party organs, and that most of the noble conspirators had been isolated figures within their caste and families, had apparently been forgotten.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Carl Zuckmayer, Die Opposition in Deutschland, Rede im Ehrenhof des Bendlerblocks am 20.07.1969 in Berlin, online at: www.20-juli-44.de/reden/.

¹⁰⁹ See: Beide Geschichten erzählen: Der Historiker Stephan Malinowski über die Begeisterung im deutschen Adel für den Nationalsozialismus und die Rolle von Grafen und Baronen beim Attentat auf Hitler, *SPIEGEL*, 12.07.2004.

Strategies of Rehabilitation: Autobiography as Transfiguration

Introduction

Who has defined our image of East-Prussia? Before the war, as well as up to the 1980s, this was almost exclusively the domain of noble authors – Marion Countess Dönhoff, Hans Count Lehndorff, Alexander Prince Dohna-Schlobitten, Esther Countess Schwerin. We are thus under the impression that noblemen ride through the East-Prussian countryside, chatting in a caring, paternalistic sort of way with their subjects and that squires maintain order. Many people during the formative years of the Federal Republic did not want to deal with the problematic heritage of the Third Reich, but instead preferred such images, which allowed for a romantic and nostalgic transfiguration of a lost world in the East.¹

Dr Andreas Kossert. *SPIEGEL*, 25.01.2011

The alignment of the East-Elbian nobility with the anti-Hitler resistance was, as we have seen, one strand of the process by which nobles sought to decontaminate and rebuild the reputation of their social caste after 1945. Another strategy was the transfiguration of East Elbia and its traditional social relations into a site of nostalgia and desire. For decades after the Second World War, millions of German refugees still viewed the regions east of the river Elbe as their *Heimat* and longed to return there. Noble autobiographies catered to this market and exploited these emotions by

¹ Randlage mit Bollwerksfunktion – Der Osteuropahistoriker Andreas Kossert über den Mythos Ostpreußen, die chauvinistische Vergangenheit und die Wiederentdeckung des kulturellen Reichtums, *SPIEGEL*, 25.01.2011.

projecting the image of an egalitarian, economically prosperous society, bound together by a strong sense of mutual obligation, and set in a landscape of incomparable scenic beauty. The once dominant image of the dashing, militaristic Junker officer² gave way to the simulacrum of the caring and indulgent squire whose only concern was the wellbeing of his people. The nobility managed to create a space outside history. Noble life in the East, closely centred on the patrimonial estate system, was wrested from the contamination of the Third Reich and integrated into a carefully constructed world of romanticism and nostalgia.

Autobiographies can be mined for various purposes. They can be used to illuminate how societal changes make themselves felt in individual lives, or to show how the experience of change within an individual life is “emplotted, bounded or framed”.³ They can offer a micro-historical lens into practices that are unlikely to be recorded elsewhere, such as the collecting and telling of fairy tales in nineteenth-century France.⁴ Alternatively, they can be used to break down large ideological phenomena into individual packages of sentiment and intention.⁵ These modes of engagement

² See: Heinz Reif, Die Junker, in: Etienne Francois und Hagen Schulze (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (Munich, 2001), pp. 520–536; Ferdinand Seibt, *Das alte böse Lied. Rückblicke auf die deutsche Geschichte 1900–1945* (Munich, 2000), p. 57.

³ Carolyn A. Barros, Figura, Persona, Dynamis: Autobiography and Change, in: *Biography*, 15:1 (1992), pp. 1–28.

⁴ David M. Hopkin, Storytelling, Fairytales and Autobiography: Some Observations on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Soldiers' and Sailors' Memoirs, in: *Social History*, 29:2 (2004), pp. 186–198.

⁵ Thomas Hippler, Les Soldats allemands dans l'armée Napoléonienne d'après leurs autobiographies: Micro-républicanisme et décivilisation, in: *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 348, Guerre(s), Société(s), Mémoire (April/June 2007), pp. 117–130.

presuppose that the autobiography grants the researcher privileged access to a world of private experience that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

As we shall see, this approach would not be entirely appropriate for an investigation intent on discovering how members of the nobility attempted to reposition themselves in the world after 1945. For one thing, the noblemen and -women who published autobiographies after 1945 did not acknowledge the rehabilitation of their caste as a legitimate subject matter. Their writings were evidence of the phenomenon of self-rehabilitation, not descriptions of it. Moreover, as members of a social group deeply concerned with their collective and public destiny and preoccupied by questions of decorum, noble autobiography writers tended to avoid the 'significant selfhood' – particularly in relation to personal relationships – which is considered a structuring feature of the traditional autobiography. In that respect, they resembled those working-class Victorian autobiographies of which it has been said lack 'flair' and 'personality'. Their writing, as Virginia Woolf remarked of the papers of the Women's Co-operative Guild, "lacks detachment and imaginative breadth".⁶ Yet when we read them en masse, as the highly imitative articulations of a collective habitus, they reveal a great deal about how the East-Elbian nobility came to terms with the need to define their standing in a post-war, bourgeois society still deeply unsettled by the memory of Nazism.

⁶ Regenia Gagnier, *Social Atoms: Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity, and Gender*, in: *Victorian Studies*, 30:3 (1987), pp. 335–363.

Both major crises in twentieth century German history produced waves of memoirs. Autobiographies had been used before, but only in the twentieth century did they become a crucial tool of exculpation. In the nineteenth century, few nobles had published autobiographies, and those that did were exceptional individuals who had held high office and had 'something to say' about national politics. In these accounts, the author carefully constructed their own important role in the vicissitudes of politics, but generally refrained from giving detailed insight into their private life.⁷ Only after the caesura of the First World War did the autobiography become a strategic tool for the East-Elbian nobility to re-establish their individual reputation, as well as its collective standing. Yet, it is impossible to capture the specificities of what occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century without establishing the contrast between autobiographical production after World War Two and its antecedents in the interwar period. Only by making this comparison can we see how fundamentally the nobility's strategy shifted between the two conflicts.

After the First World War, the nobility developed a radically anti-democratic, elitist, and racist rhetoric, aligning itself in many cases with the extreme right. After the Second World War, the nobility chose a different course: it redefined itself by degrees as a depoliticised elite. The political activism and corporate agenda of the interwar period gave way to a much

⁷ Funck and Malinowski, *Masters of Memory*, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, p. 92; See: Otto von Bismarck, *Gedanken und Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1922); Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz, *Lebensbeschreibung* (Berlin, 1852); Karl August Fürst von Hardenberg, *Denkwürdigkeiten des Staatskanzlers Fürsten von Hardenberg* (Leipzig, 1877); Gebhard von Blücher, *Vorwärts! Ein Husarentagebuch und Feldzugsbriefe* (Munich, 1914); Sophie Marie Gräfin von Voss, *69 Jahre am Preußischen Hofe* (Leipzig, 1894).

more apolitical and individualised history management. The nobility began to embrace the new political order, and turned itself into a symbolic elite. The foundation for this symbolic elitism is formed by the strategic transfiguration of the idyllic pre-war patrimonial world.

Post World War I

From Collapse to Resurgence

The collapse of Germany in 1918 marked a profound caesura in noble life. Between 4,500 and 4,800 noble officers, and almost a quarter of the adult male population, had fallen victim to the war.⁸ *The Hero-Memorial-Booklet of the German Nobility*, published in 1921, listed 675 only sons, 100 fathers and sons and 497 brothers who fell in the “hottest heat of the battle or went missing on audacious patrols [...] in churning waters, in the thicket of the jungle or in the horrors of the dessert’s solitude”.⁹ Furthermore, with the proclamation of the republic, and the Kaiser’s flight to Holland, the East-Elbian nobility lost its connection to the monarch as the head of the noble

⁸ Iris Freifrau von Hoyningen-Huene, *Adel in der Weimarer Republik. Die rechtlich-soziale Situation des reichsdeutschen Adels 1918–1933* (Limburg an der Lahn, 1992), pp. 22–23; see also: Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 319–320.

⁹ Alexis von Schoenermarck, *Helden-Gedenkmappe des Deutschen Adels* (Stuttgart, 1921), cited in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 200. The high number of casualties obviously correlates with the fact that, especially in East Elbia, many noble families were old military clans, which for centuries had sent their later-born sons into the Prussian army. In 1914, the Puttkamers listed 49 active officers, the Kleists 44, the Zitzewitz 34 and the Bonins 30. During the war 33 Bülow, 26 Arnim, 24 Wedel, 22 Oertzen, 21 Puttkamer, 19 Schwerin, 16 Knobelsdorff, 13 Dewitz and 9 Below, Marwitz and Zitzewitz fell. See: Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 319–320.

hierarchy, as supreme commander, and emperor of the Reich. The previous congruence of loyalty to the monarch and loyalty to the state ceased to exist in the republic.¹⁰

The Weimar constitution of 1919 furthermore abolished the nobility as a privileged social class and deprived it of its titles. Article 155 also proclaimed the dissolution of the *Fideikommiss*, the legal rampart protecting the integrity of the large estates.¹¹ Although large-scale expropriation of the nobility was discussed, it did not find a majority in parliament. In 1927, however, after years of debate, the Prussian government ultimately attempted to tackle the nobility's supremacy on the land by abolishing the *Gutsbezirke*. These remnants of feudal lordship formed the local fundament of the political power of the nobility. Within these administrative districts, the squire's power was supreme; besides him, there was no other communal organ to represent the will of the people.¹² At last, the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles in 1920 led to the reduction of the army to a mere 100,000 men. This step not only significantly curtailed the nobility's influence on state affairs, but also deprived it of its main source of income for later born sons. Within the span of a few years, the parameters of the nobility's existence had therefore changed dramatically.

¹⁰ Wencke Meteling, *Der deutsche Zusammenbruch 1918 in den Selbstzeugnissen adliger preußischer Offiziere*, in: Wienfort und Conze (eds), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 289.

¹¹ See: Jens Beckert, *Unverdientes Vermögen, Soziologie des Erbrechts* (Frankfurt a. M., 2004), pp. 184–186. 1167 Fideikommisses existed in Prussia in 1919, covering 1.8 Million hectares of land. See Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 344.

¹² Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*, p. 91; In 1927, there were still approximately 12,000 *Gutsbezirke*, which covered 29 per cent of Prussia and comprised about 1.5 million people. See: Horst Möller, *Parlamentarismus in Preussen 1919–1932* (Düsseldorf, 1985) p. 474.

The nobility, however, was not willing to accept this erosion of its power. As soon as the first shock had faded, it went to work in an attempt to recapture its dominant role in society. As Eckart Conze illustrated in his study concerning the Bernstorff family, many noblemen succeeded in either preventing the establishment of local revolutionary peasant councils or managed to influence them in line with their own interests.¹³ They also set up local militias and pressure groups to protect their assets and encouraged other noblemen to do the same.¹⁴ This was especially the case in the foremost eastern province of the Reich, East Prussia, which witnessed the establishment of numerous such private militias. Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau prominently formed a three-dozen strong “assault detachment” against “revolutionary sailors”;¹⁵ Wilhelm von Oppen-Tornow hid reactionary rebels in his manor house; and Alexander Prince Dohna-Schlobitten secreted weapons and ammunitions in his private chapel.¹⁶ Other noblemen, such as Count Brünneck-Belschwitz, Count Dohna-Tolksdorf and Count Eulenburg-Wicken, formed the Heimatbund Ostpreußen to counter “domestic revolutionary elements” as well as the threat posed by Soviet

¹³ Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*, pp. 29–50, especially 37; See also: Axel Schildt, Der Putsch der Prätorianer, Junker und Alldutschen. Adel und Bürgertum in den Anfangswirren der Weimarer Republik, in: Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, p. 109; Jens Flemming, *Landwirtschaftliche Interessen und Demokratie, Ländliche Gesellschaft, Agrarverbände und Staat 1890–1925* (Bonn, 1978), p. 161.

¹⁴ See the appeal of the Prussian association of forest owners on 3 June 1919. Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*, p. 415.

¹⁵ Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1936), p. 209.

¹⁶ Alexander Fürst zu Dohna-Schlobitten, *Erinnerungen eines alten Ostpreußen* (Berlin, 1989), p. 165.

Russia and Poland.¹⁷ Additionally, noblemen played key roles in the founding of paramilitary organisations such as the Stahlhelm.¹⁸

Additionally, the East-Elbian nobility supported en masse the numerous Freikorps set up throughout the Reich to shoot down the revolution. Besides providing significant financial assistance, a disproportionately high number of noblemen joined these paramilitary organisations to fight the revolution.¹⁹ As one of the most notorious Freikorps leaders, Walther von Lüttwitz, proclaimed “the desire of the old officers to render service to the Reich by defending it against Bolshevism was immense”.²⁰ Although there are no precise numbers of the nobility’s overall share in the Freikorps, the fact that 42 out of the 132 Freikorps bore noble names, and that certain Freikorps predominantly consisted of former officers of the Imperial Army, indicates large-scale noble participation.²¹ A closer look at the noble share of the officers involved in the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in March 1920 further substantiates this claim. When the Treaty of Versailles was implemented and the reduction of the army was finalised in early 1920, the government was forced to dissolve the Freikorps. Many members, however, were unwilling to accept this ruling, and General von Lüttwitz marched his troops to Berlin in

¹⁷ Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 354.

¹⁸ Volker Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm – Bund der Frontsoldaten 1918–1935* (Düsseldorf, 1966), pp. 56, 133.

¹⁹ For financing of the Freikorps see: Günter Paulus, Die soziale Struktur der Freikorps, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 5:3 (1955), pp. 685–704.

²⁰ Walther von Lüttwitz, *Im Kampf gegen die Novemberrevolution* (Berlin, 1934), p. 49.

²¹ Nigel H. Jones, *Hitler’s Herolds. The Story of the Freikorps 1918–1923* (London 1987), pp. 249–265; Paulus, Die soziale Struktur der Freikorps, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, pp. 685–704; Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik 1918–1920* (Boppard am Rhein, 1969), pp. 47–54.

an attempt to overthrow the government and install a reactionary dictatorship. Out of the 540 officers charged after the coup, 116 members belonged to the nobility, forming almost a quarter of its contingent.²² These numerous direct interventions in politics and counter revolutionary activities show that despite an initial state of shock following Germany's military and political collapse, the nobility quickly went to work to salvage the remnants of its power.

A Stab in the Back: Drafting the Image of Infallible Noble Leadership

Simultaneously, this undertaking was powerfully flanked by a literary campaign to regain interpretative sovereignty over the reasons for and meaning behind Germany's catastrophe. The predominant tool in this operation was the autobiography. It served as an instrument of self-assurance and intra-corporate communication. It allowed noble authors to process their individual experiences of the war, and the downfall of the monarchy, while simultaneously contributing to a joint effort to exculpate the nobility as a whole. More importantly, however, it "proved to be an exquisite tool to defame the political enemy".²³ Countless noblemen took up the pen to foster the notorious "stab in the back" theory, blaming the military collapse on the 'weakness' and 'betrayal' of the home front. This myth,

²² See the list of officers in Emil Julius Gumbel, *Verschwörer. Zur Geschichte und Soziologie der deutschen nationalistischen Geheimbünde 1918–1924* (Frankfurt a. M., 1984), pp. 62–71; see also: Schildt, *Der Putsch der Prätorianer*, in: Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, pp. 103–125.

²³ Meteling, *Der deutsche Zusammenbruch 1918 in den Selbstzeugnissen adliger preußischer Offiziere*, in: Wienfort und Conze (eds.), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 292.

originally developed by the army's former General Chief of Staff, Erich Ludendorff, in 1919, resurfaces in almost every noble autobiography of the Weimar Republic.²⁴ Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg, former head of the Supreme Army Command and subsequent President of the Weimar Republic, prominently claimed, "our government conceded in the hope for clemency and justice".²⁵ As a result, "our exhausted front collapsed like Siegfried under the deceitful javelin throw of the ferocious Hagen".²⁶ According to Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen, the social democrats even "systematically carried revolutionary subversion from the homeland [...] to the frontline".²⁷ For Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, "the young glory of the German Reich had been tainted by the betrayal of its own people".²⁸ The general consensus was that "neither Versailles and its consequences, nor the Polenschmach in the East, nor the French incursion into the Ruhr area would have occurred" without the betrayal of the home front.²⁹ The noble authors painted the image of an army that had returned "undefeated by the enemy, covered in glory and wounds";³⁰ an army, which according to Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz, had "won the greatest 'breakthrough battles' and had proven to be the paramount victor on the battlefield" only to be abandoned "in the

²⁴ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), p.31; also see: Manfred Nebelin, *Ludendorff: Diktator im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2011).

²⁵ Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben* (Leipzig, 1934), p. 395.

²⁶ Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben*, p. 403.

²⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm von Oertzen, *Die deutschen Freikorps 1918–1923* (Munich, 1938), p. 245.

²⁸ Oldenburg, *Erinnerungen*, p. 208.

²⁹ Hugo von Freytag Loringhoven, *Menschen und Dinge wie ich sie in meinem Leben sah* (Berlin, 1920), p. 330.

³⁰ Oldenburg, *Erinnerungen*, p. 213.

most dreadful fashion”.³¹ In return for their heroics, “the ungrateful fatherland and the dishonourable people tore the decorations off their chests and the epaulettes off their shoulders”.³² As much as all these literary assaults were attempts to exculpate the former imperial officer corps – one should not forget that by the beginning of the war, the noble share of the corps accounted for almost forty per cent³³ – they were designed to directly intervene in day-to-day politics and help to attack and delegitimise the new order.

At the same time, the exceedingly self-righteous and brazenly self-defensive tone of these memoirs suggests that the noble authors were entirely unwilling to accept any sort of responsibility for the collapse of the German Empire. The common narrative was that the government of the Reich had already been interspersed with subversive “republican elements” and had lacked the resolute leadership required to destroy the “undignified vermin” of Bolshevism.³⁴ Ostensibly, if only the nobility had been allowed to, they would have shot down the revolution. Hugo Graf von Westarp, one of the founding members of the DNVP, assigned responsibility for the collapse of Germany to South-German republicans who “in reality had caused the

³¹ Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz, *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum* (Leipzig, 1920), p. 30.

³² Oldenburg, *Erinnerungen*, p. 213.

³³ Detlef Bald, *Der deutsche Offizier. Sozial und Bildungsgeschichte des deutschen Offizierskorps im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1982), pp. 21, 39.

³⁴ Michael Epkenhans: “Wir als deutsches Volk sind doch nicht klein zu kriegen ...”. Aus den Tagebüchern des Fregattenkapitäns Bogislav von Selchow. 1918/19, in: *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 55 (1996), p. 201.

abolition of the monarchy by means of a forged abdication of the Kaiser”.³⁵ Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau was “deeply disappointed” that the government had not issued a “firing order”. If only he had been atop the government, he would have been the man “who fired himself”. Ernst Graf zu Reventlow was convinced that “under decisive and vigorous leadership, a small detachment of troops could have quickly restored order in Berlin”. Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz wanted the navy to bomb Stockholm in case Sweden intended to give up neutrality and defect to the Allies. “This manly argumentation would have had a far greater effect than the pathetic advances of German diplomats.” Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg, the former chief of staff of the army group Kronprinz, intended to put the Kaiser at the head of his troops and shoot down the revolts in the Reich.³⁶

While accusing the government of sacrificing the Reich on the “altars of liberalism and social-democracy”, the noble authors were quick to point out that their unrivalled leadership skills had remained unaffected throughout the crisis. Rüdiger Graf von der Goltz claimed his troops “maintained [their] firm and proud discipline and remained loyal to the monarch until the very end”. The wavering few were won over by a passionate speech, at the end of which, everybody cheered the abdicated Kaiser.³⁷ Colonel General Karl von Einem similarly celebrated his troops, “[who] had proved as valuable in the war of attrition on the western front as they had on horseback in the east and

³⁵ Kuno Graf von Westarp, *Das Ende der Monarchie am 9. November 1918. Abschließender Bericht nach den Aussagen der Beteiligten*, Werner Conze (ed.) (Berlin, 1952), p. 140.

³⁶ For a detailed account of Count Schulenburg’s plans see: Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg, *Denkschrift zum 9 November*, LHAM-AW, Rep. H Karow, Nr. 219, Fol. 48–57, all cited in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 231.

³⁷ Goltz, *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum*, p. 30.

had marched back into the Heimat in firm discipline".³⁸ By reaffirming the loyalty of their troops, the authors reassure themselves of their accomplishment as commanding officer. The troops' reliability during war thereby becomes the officers' legitimisation as leaders. The fact that von Einem had frequently referred to the exhaustion and the hopelessness of his troops and the concomitantly increasing rate of desertion in his diary in autumn 1918 had long been forgotten by the time of his memoir's publication a decade later.³⁹

As much as these affirmations of leadership skills were attempts to exculpate the author of any responsibility for Germany's collapse, they were at the same time designed to align the nobility with the newly evolving Führer concepts of the far right.⁴⁰ Authors such as Joseph Arthur Count Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and even Walther Rathenau, grounded their ideas of a new elite on racial/Germanic categories rather than birth. In their visions, biological, as well as intellectual-psychological criteria, formed the basis for a "new" aristocracy, a small elite of ruthless leaders who would guide the confused and disoriented masses;⁴¹ such ideas partly formed the basis for the later writings of authors such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck

³⁸ Karl von Einem, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 45.

³⁹ Meteling, *Der deutsche Zusammenbruch 1918 in den Selbstzeugnissen adliger preußischer Offiziere*, in: Wienfort und Conze (eds.), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 297.

⁴⁰ See especially Stephan Malinowski's chapters: *Führertum und Neuer Adel* as well as *Führertum und Adelserneuerung*, in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 299–321; See also: Edgar Julius Jung, *Adel oder Elite?*, in: *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), pp. 533–535; Edgar Julius Jung, *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen* (Berlin, 1927).

⁴¹ See: Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899); Joseph Arthur Count Gobineau, *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen* (Stuttgart, 1902); Alexandra Gerstner, *Neuer Adel – Aristokratische Elitekonzeptionen zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Nationalsozialismus* (Darmstadt, 2008), pp. 115–130.

and Walther Darré.⁴² Even though for the large majority of the nobility, the monarchy remained the desired system of government, the idea of a strong Führertum, centred on 'people' and 'fatherland', became more and more popular.⁴³ Deprived of the traditional monarch, such a newly founded *Volkgemeinschaft* was to be headed by a dictator and a so-called "Führer-Adel". Thus when Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau proudly restored order on his estate solely by threatening to "beat the hell" out of an insurgent peasant, it was always an act of self-assurance, but also an attempt to portray the inherent steadfastness and resoluteness of the nobility and its predisposition to rule.⁴⁴ It is a similar case when the former crown prince recites an anecdote in his memoirs, published in 1922, in which he "gave such a shout to a riotous bloke that he, shivering and green with fear, saluted without cease".⁴⁵ Manfred von Killinger, a member of the Freikorps Marinebrigade Ehrhardt, even ordered brutal force to be used against every insurgent, male as well as female, only to justify it by claiming that "everything else the riffraff would have interpreted as 'weakness'".⁴⁶ Lita zu Putlitz, who was allegedly supposed to be hanged by a revolutionary council, repulsed her executioners by firmly declaring her loyalty to the

⁴² See: Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich* (Berlin, 1923); Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich, 1923).

⁴³ Martin Kohlrausch, Die Flucht des Kaisers - Doppeltes Scheitern adlig-bürgerlicher Monarchiekonzepte, in: Reif, *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, pp. 65–101; Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 209.

⁴⁴ Oldenburg, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 207–209.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm, *Deutscher Kronprinz und von Preußen, Erinnerungen* (Wieringen, 1922), p. 330.

⁴⁶ Manfred von Killinger, *Ernstes und Heiteres aus dem Putschleben* (Munich, 1927), p. 52.

Kaiser. "The revolutionaries stole away in shame."⁴⁷ All these anecdotes contained a central message: even during the upheavals of revolution and republic, the nobility stood firm, and due to its ancient and infallible experience in leadership, it was predestined to rule in the future.

Self-Critical Views

In addition, the interwar autobiographies impress by the intensity of their corporatism, and thereby stand in sharp contrast to the much more individualistic approach adopted after the Second World War. The memoirs of the Weimar Republic are almost exclusively dominated by the desire to attack the political enemy, delegitimise the new order, and re-establish a paramount noble dominance of politics and society. The complete denial of the nobility's culpability in the collapse of the empire is coupled with the defamation of the republic and its dignitaries, and an absurd glorification of the nobility's alleged predisposition to lead. The level of corporatism among the authors of the autobiographies is further exemplified by what happened to members of the nobility who dared to break out of this carefully crafted narrative. Paul von Schoenaich, a former general of the imperial army, had ventured publicly to condemn the mendacity of official war reporting and excoriate the Kaiser's flight to Holland. These events had convinced him that "after the armistice, the old powers and system of government had to vanish

⁴⁷ Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 329; For more examples see: Wolfgang Gans Edler Herr zu Putlitz, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 13, 14; Fritz Günther von Tschirschky, *Erinnerungen eines Hochverrätters* (Stuttgart, 1972), pp. 32, 36, 37.

irrevocably".⁴⁸ In 1918, he joined the German Democratic Party and published articles against the "stab in the back theory". In 1922, he became a member of the German Peace Society. This radical break with the traditions and convictions of his peers led to his discharge from the army and expulsion from various officer- and regiment-associations.⁴⁹ While the overwhelming majority of authors tried to transfigure the collapse into a heroic struggle of the old "undefeated" army, shift the blame onto the home front and glorify their own leadership skills in an attempt to qualify themselves for a dominant role in an authoritarian future, Schoenaich's critical position resulted in social ostracism.

A similar fate awaited Robert Graf von Zedlitz und Trützschler, former imperial court marshal and son of the former Prussian minister of cultural affairs, who had labelled the Kaiser's rule as "despotism" and bemoaned the "dangers" of a hereditary monarchy in which millions of people are forced to entrust their destiny to the hands of a man only empowered by the coincidence of birth.⁵⁰ Not only was he expelled from the Association of the German Nobility (Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft (DAG)), but the majority of his family also boycotted him. He was disinvited from hunting parties and called a 'traitor' by his neighbours. This situation amounted to a virtual social execution.⁵¹ In some cases, however, the defensive mechanisms of the

⁴⁸ Paul von Schoenaich, *Mein Damaskus* (Berlin, 1925), p. 205.

⁴⁹ Meteling, *Der deutsche Zusammenbruch 1918 in den Selbstzeugnissen adliger preußischer Offiziere*, in: Wienfort und Conze (eds), *Adel und Moderne*, p. 318.

⁵⁰ Robert Graf von Zedlitz und Trützschler, *Zwölf Jahre am deutschen Kaiserhof* (Stuttgart, 1923), pp. 248, 249.

⁵¹ Alexander Stahlberg, *Als Preußen noch Preußen war. Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 131–132; For Zedlitz' exclusion from the DAG see: Erwein Freiherr von Aretin, *Adel, Nation und*

old elites resulted in even more grotesque reactions. When in 1919, Paul Graf von Hoensbroech ridiculed Wilhelm II in a brochure as a pompous coward, Friedrich Graf von der Schulenburg demanded that two of his officers challenge Hoensbroech to a duel.⁵²

The striking level of corporatism is also reflected in the correspondence of the aforementioned Graf von der Schulenburg and Dietlof Graf von Arnim, which reveals Schulenburg's deep concern with the publications of critical noble autobiographies. "After Waldersee and Zedlitz the 'wretchedness' of Bülow has a disastrous effect. [...] I see in Bülow the gravedigger of the German empire."⁵³ The former Reich Chancellor, Bernhard Fürst von Bülow, had used his posthumously published memoirs in 1930 to settle scores with the Kaiser. At length, he lamented the Kaiser's imprudence and political faux pas, and remarked that the "careless, hasty, foolish and even childish governance of the head of the Reich inevitably had to end in catastrophe".⁵⁴ This sharp criticism led to heated debates in wide circles of the nobility. The General Imperial Administration in Doorn, supported by the head of DAG, even called for the family association of the Bülows to publicly denounce the statements of the former Reich Chancellor.⁵⁵

Krone, in: *In Treue fest* (21.7.1924), cited in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 465; A detailed description of the boycott of his peers can be found in: Gerhard von Jordan, *Unser Dorf in Schlesien* (Berlin, 1987), p. 181.

⁵² Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 249.

⁵³ Rainer Pomp, Dietlof Graf von Arnim-Boitzenburg, *Wandlungen eines preußischen Konservativen bis 1933*, cited in: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 251.

⁵⁴ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen, Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 2002), p. 300.

⁵⁵ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 250.

Overall, the noble autobiographies of the Weimar era show a striking unity of thought. The writings are strategically used to defend the common narrative of a strong and infallible noble leadership, defame the political enemy, and build a bridge to the newly evolving authoritarian ideology of the far right. At the same time, the corporate activism revealed in the treatment of critical peers exposes the nobility's gradual transformation from a traditional political elite into somewhat of an "imagined community", eager to cement its external boundaries.⁵⁶

Post World War II

The Apologia of the 1945-Generation

The unconditional surrender of the Axis powers in 1945 resulted in the second and final defeat of the East-Elbian nobility. Already abolished as an independent social and political force in 1918, the expropriation of the large ancestral estates in the East irrevocably robbed the nobility of its traditional economic and cultural basis of power.⁵⁷ As after Germany's collapse in 1918, a crisis of such magnitude triggered a glut of noble memoirs. However, on this occasion, two major waves of autobiographical production must be differentiated. The first wave spans from the late 1940s until the late 1960s. Former career officers, dignitaries of the Third Reich, and surviving members

⁵⁶ Marcus Funck und Stephan Malinowski, *Geschichte von Oben*, *Autobiographien als Quellen einer Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Adels in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik*, in: *Historische Anthropologie*, 7 (1999), p. 244.

⁵⁷ For detailed depictions of the severity of losses see Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 425–428.

of the military resistance dominate the authorship of this period. They use these autobiographies to clarify – or rather transfigure – their role in society, while at the same time trying to exculpate and distance themselves from the criminality of the Nazi regime.

The second wave was shaped primarily by people who had still grown up in the manor houses of East Elbia, but who had not played any social or political role in the Third Reich. Following the *Ostpolitik* of the 1960s, as well as the growing realisation that East Elbia had become – in an irrevocable sense – the “world we have lost”, a new type of remembrance literature developed. The apologetic and partly aggressive character of the early autobiographies gave way to a more personal and nostalgic farewell tone.⁵⁸

The early post-war works were still aligned with the noble autobiographical output of the Weimar Republic, remaining a medium of strategic exculpation and apologia. Yet the point of departure was completely shifted. In 1918, the nobility had fought a largely honourable – and for a long period, popular – war. Despite defeat and revolution, the old monarchical system still enjoyed considerable support among large parts of society. This residual affirmation allowed the nobility not only to glorify and defend the old political and social order, but also to attack and actively fight the political enemy from a position of relative strength. After 1945, conversely, political activism of this kind disappeared. The complete destruction of Germany, the loss of East Elbia, and the expropriation of the estates had unsettled and bewildered the nobility to such a degree that it was obliterated as an influential political

⁵⁸ Reif, Die Junker, in: Francois und Schulze (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, p. 535.

force. Furthermore, the Third Reich had been so heavily discredited that nobody wanted to be associated with it. There was, therefore, nothing to glorify or defend anymore. The focus of the nobility instead shifted to an effort to distance themselves from the criminality of the regime.

Former career officers generally justified their continued loyalty to the Third Reich with their personal oath to Adolf Hitler.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, they shifted the responsibility for the collapse of the Wehrmacht exclusively onto the military incompetence of the Führer, due to whom the German generals could only achieve “lost victories”.⁶⁰ The autobiographies of this time are rife with condescending remarks about Hitler’s ineptitude and inability to understand the fundamentals of military strategy. Field Marshal von Manstein repeatedly denied Hitler’s grasp of “the fundamental basics of real military prowess”. According to him, Hitler believed solely in the “power of his will”, but was lacking any understanding of the art of war.⁶¹ Field Marshal von Rundstedt mockingly labelled Hitler’s supposedly omnipotent West Wall as a mere “mouse-trap”, and although he “would never have broken his oath”, frequently described how difficult it had been to remain in command due to the “personal and military differences” and the “growing

⁵⁹ Exemplary in this context is Fieldmarschall von Manstein’s comment after the war: “We had not learnt to gamble with the definition of the oath.” Erich von Manstein, *Aus einem Soldatenleben* (Bonn, 1958), p. 270; Also see: Ernst Auer, *Zwischen Eid und Gewissen* (Vienna, 1983), p. 65; Also see: Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer, Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion, 1941/42* (Munich, 2007), p. 134.

⁶⁰ “Lost Victories” was the title of Erich von Manstein’s memoirs: Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler’s Most Brilliant General* (London, 1958).

⁶¹ Erich von Manstein, *Verlorene Siege* (Frankfurt a. M., 1955), p. 618.

political distrust” between himself and the Führer.⁶² Enno von Rintelen, the former German military attaché in Rome, adopted the same line of argument when complaining about Hitler’s blindness “to accept neither the warnings of the diplomat⁶³ nor the soldier⁶⁴ about the overestimation of Italian military strength”.⁶⁵ For Walther von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, who famously defected to the Soviets after the battle of Stalingrad, Hitler was “without doubt the main culprit”.⁶⁶

While former officers tried to foist responsibility onto Hitler, other noble dignitaries of the Third Reich tried to convey the image of a prescient political elite, which had anticipated the evil character of the regime from the very beginning. Their collaboration is skilfully framed and presented as a strategic attempt to control, direct and undermine National Socialism to prevent Germany’s slide into catastrophe. The former Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen, who served as Vice-Chancellor in Hitler’s first cabinet, claimed in his memoirs in 1952 that he had “realized it would not be easy to bring Hitler and his party to a sense of statesmanlike responsibility” and thus “made what suggestions [he] could for keeping the Nazis within bounds”.⁶⁷ Ernst von Weizsäcker, under-secretary in the Foreign Office, very quickly “came under the impression that the now ruling party did not solely

⁶² Guenther Blumentritt and Gerd von Rundstedt, *The Soldier and the Man* (London, 1952), p. 278.

⁶³ Ulrich von Hassel, the German Ambassador in Rome at the time.

⁶⁴ The author himself, the German military attaché in Italy at the time.

⁶⁵ Enno von Rintelen, *Mussolini als Bundesgenosse, Erinnerungen des deutschen Militärattachés in Rom 1936–1943* (Tübingen, 1951), p. 256.

⁶⁶ Walther von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, *Stalingrad – Konflikt und Konsequenz – Erinnerungen* (Oldenburg, 1977), p. 232.

⁶⁷ Franz von Papen, *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse* (Munich, 1952), p. 239.

consist of noisy troublemakers and demagogues, but of dangerous revolutionaries, of people who were capable of carrying out their threats".⁶⁸ As consequence, he advised his fellow colleagues, such as under-secretary Bernhard Wilhelm von Bülow, to "remain in office until the rider had crossed lake Constance", since he "could not believe in the perpetuation of the Third Reich".⁶⁹ Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, Minister of Finance under Papen, Schleicher and Hitler, apparently recognised the evil character of the Nazis as early as 1932 and "would have loved to spare the German people a National Socialist rule". Yet, he feared a violent struggle with the Nazis, and therefore opted for Hitler's nomination to be able to control him from within.⁷⁰

This oft-recurring 'taming concept' (*Zähmungskonzept*), however, was driven less by fear of Nazi violence than of the fascination of an emphatically national mass movement. The deluded hope that one might solve a highly precarious domestic political situation while simultaneously profiting from the potential of National Socialist mass appeal essentially contributed to the fatal underestimation of Hitler.⁷¹ In this context, we also see Tilo von Wilmowsky, a German industrialist and brother in law to Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, retrospectively justifying his party membership as an attempt to "turn the tide and avoid a further drift into radical waters".⁷² With

⁶⁸ Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen* (Munich, 1950), pp. 104, 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 106.

⁷⁰ Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, *Memoiren* (Stuttgart, 1977), p. 152.

⁷¹ Andreas Wirsching, *Die Weimarer Republik, Politik und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 2000), p. 42.

⁷² Tilo von Wilmowsky, *Rückblickend möchte ich sagen... An der Schwelle des 150 jährigen Krupp Jubiläums* (Oldenburg, 1961), p. 223.

fellow colleagues, he wanted to “erect a dyke against the rising flood”.⁷³ Otto von Hentig also tried to excuse his liaison position between the NSDAP and the Auswärtige Amt, assigned to him by Rudolf Heß, as an effort to ensure the “highest possible unity” of the Auswärtige Amt. He regarded it as a “necessary and important achievement” to procure peaceful working relations between the Amt and the Nazi party. Only thereby, he claimed, was it possible to keep the “machinations of the party” under control.⁷⁴

Yet, although after 1945, the main focus had shifted from defending and glorifying the old system to distancing oneself from the previous regime, the narrative of noble superiority remained completely unabated. Once again, the nobility appears as a “rocher de bronze, an embodiment of a superior culture and way of life, which had not been able to halt the National Socialist masses, but which had maintained an insurmountable distance from them”.⁷⁵ The wild revolutionary masses of the post 1918 accounts gave way to ill-mannered “upstarts” in “badly fitted uniforms” who performed “pseudo-military parades”.⁷⁶ Adolf Hitler was frequently referred to as a “dodger”, a “minion” or simply the “bohemian lance corporal”.⁷⁷ Leo Gayr von Schweppenburg, a high-ranking Panzer-General, condescendingly contrasted him with Anthony Eden, “adjutant of the Rifle Brigade, outwardly extremely smart, on top of that collector of French miniatures and

⁷³ Ibid, p. 222.

⁷⁴ Otto von Hentig, *Mein Leben – Eine Dienstreise* (Göttingen, 1962), p. 293.

⁷⁵ Funck and Malinowski, *Masters of Memory*, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, p. 96.

⁷⁶ Alexander von Falkenhausen, Was ich dachte und was ich tat. Aufzeichnungen des ehemaligen Militärbefehlshabers von Belgien in der Haft, Auszüge aus seinen Memoiren in *Die Zeit*, 27.04.1950; Seydlitz-Kurzbach, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 84, 75.

⁷⁷ Gans Edler zu Putlitz, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland*, pp. 106–107.

Persian love poems, overall the noble product of Oxford and Eaton. On the other hand Adolf Hitler".⁷⁸ Friedrich von Prittwitz, the former German ambassador to the United States, was "deeply impressed" by the Führer's "insecurity",⁷⁹ while Otto von Hentig, a high ranking diplomat, referred to *Mein Kampf* as an opus "brewed up by a vain autodidact". He remembered Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Foreign Minister of the Third Reich, as a "little lieutenant" he had met in Constantinople during the First World War, a notion, which "did not change" over the years.⁸⁰ For Fabian von Schlabrendorff, the Nazis "showed a complete lack of good manners, a deliberate rejection of decorum and the proprieties, and a brutal, coarse vitality".⁸¹ Field Marshall Erich von Manstein labelled the "vociferous" and "violent" methods of the party as particularly "un-Prussian", and Ernst von Weizsäcker disdained the Nazis to a degree that he was simply unable "to take them seriously".⁸²

By contrast with the earlier autobiographical wave, the post-1945 works did not advance the alleged superiority of the nobility as a claim to continuous political and social leadership, but rather as a subtle means of depoliticising the nobility's relationship to power by reframing it as a question of social caste, refinement and taste. Thus when we see noblemen stating, "they [the Nazis] went against everything my own upbringing represented, and the

⁷⁸ Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, *Erinnerungen eines Militärattachés – London 1933–1937* (Stuttgart, 1949), p. 31.

⁷⁹ Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron, *Zwischen Petersburg und Washington – Ein Diplomatenleben* (Munich, 1952), p. 228.

⁸⁰ Hentig, *Mein Leben*, pp. 275, 322.

⁸¹ Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, p. 37.

⁸² Manstein, *Soldatenleben*, p. 168; Weizsäcker, *Erinnerungen*, p. 103.

traditions, principles, and history of families such as mine”,⁸³ we may understand that they are defining their relationship to the Nazis in terms of social distance and thereby implying a traditional and insurmountable division which inevitably kept the nobility aloof from the criminal machinations of the regime. The authors thereby construct an image of a morally and socially highly superior caste, which was beyond the ordinary brutality of National Socialism. This approach, in turn, tends to re-legitimise the hierarchical order of the old imperial regime, which is now reimagined as a bulwark against the levelling tendencies that supposedly made Nazism possible.

Noble Participation in the Historical Division of the US Army

Several of the noble authors⁸⁴ considered above had already gained experience in historical writing during the immediate aftermath of the Second World War within the framework of the newly founded Historical Division of the US-Army. Under the aegis of US officers and military historians, large parts of the former German officer corps had been encouraged to put down in writing their military experiences of the war. This large-scale strategic effort to receive and gather German strategic and operational ideas was set up to fill the gaps in Allied understanding of German strategic warfare, as well as to compile an official military account of the Second World War. Initially, these documents were largely limited to

⁸³ Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler*, p. 37.

⁸⁴ Most prominently: Kurt Rued von Collenberg, Enno von Rintelen, Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, Rudolf von Gersdorff and Alexander von Falkenhausen.

describing the western theatres of war in which the Wehrmacht had been in contact with Allied armies. In light of a rapidly escalating East-West conflict, however, the US-Army became increasingly interested in the Wehrmacht's experiences in the major battles of the Barbarossa Campaign. Especially in the context of the emerging Korean conflict, German experiences with Guerrilla warfare in rough terrain seemed to be of the highest importance.⁸⁵

These exposés were solely intended to close American gaps in knowledge. However, the deepening involvement of former German officers also encouraged them to view the work of the Historical Division both as a means of "continuing the struggle against bolshevism"⁸⁶ and of shaping the historical reputation of the Wehrmacht in general, and the officer corps and general staff, in particular. The head of a subdivision in Garmisch, former Field Marshall Georg von Küchler, repeatedly reminded his subordinates: "we do not want to write American, but German military history". In his eyes, these exposés were designed to portray "German exploits" and "thereby memorialise our troops".⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Charles B. Burdick, Vom Schwert zur Feder. Deutsche Kriegsgefangene im Dienst der Vorbereitung der amerikanischen Kriegsgeschichtsschreibung über den zweiten Weltkrieg. Die organisatorische Entwicklung der Operational History (German) Section, in: *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 10:2 (1971), p. 78.

⁸⁶ Comment of Colonel General Franz Halder, former head of the General Chief of Staff, See: Burdick, Vom Schwert zur Feder, in: *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, p. 73.

⁸⁷ Fieldmarshall von Küchler, Weisung vom 7.3.1947, BA-MA, ZA 1/70, cited in: Bernd Wegner, Erschriebene Siege, Franz Halder, die Historical Division und die Rekonstruktion des zweiten Weltkrieges im Geiste des deutschen Generalstabes, in: Ernst Willi Hansen, Gerhard Schreiber und Bernd Wegner (eds), *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit* (Munich, 1995), p. 294.

This framework also marked the birth of the strategy to whitewash the Wehrmacht and its operational heads. On the one hand, the German officers involved in the programme deliberately attempted to distance the Wehrmacht from the criminal machinations of the SS and the Einsatzgruppen and portray the Wehrmacht as the honourable remnant of German military tradition. On the other hand, they attributed the operational and strategic mistakes made to the unpredictability of climate and geography, and most importantly, to the dilettantism and obtuseness of Adolf Hitler.⁸⁸ The absence of the large majority of the official files and documents – most of it had been brought overseas by the Allies – allowed this perception to survive for years, if not decades, after the war.

One may therefore regard the participation of various noblemen in the Historical Division as a first tentative step towards an active engagement, not only in historiography itself, but also in influence of the public perception of certain social groups. It seems that these authors gained their experience by exculpating and vindicating the deeds and machinations of the Wehrmacht and the officer corps, before moving on to use these skills and techniques for their own individual benefits. What is also striking is the significantly high share of noble authors within the Historical Division. At the time of the dissolution of the Historical Division in 1961, more than five hundred authors had been enlisted, of which, more than one hundred were of noble

⁸⁸ See: Georg von Sodenstern, *Der Feldherr Adolf Hitler und das Ende einer Feldherrnrolle*; Kurt Zeitler, *Das Ringen um die großen Entscheidungen im zweiten Weltkrieg*; Franz Halder, *Hitler als Feldherr*; all cited in: Bernd Wegner, *Erschriebene Siege*, in: Hansen, Schreiber und Wegner (eds), *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit*, p. 292.

descent.⁸⁹ Although one should not forget that the German officer corps at the end of the war still included a significant share of noblemen, the importance of the nobility within the army had significantly declined throughout the Third Reich.⁹⁰ Especially considering that during the build-up of the Wehrmacht in the mid-1930s, the promotion of non-noble officers had been encouraged, and the massive expansion of the officer corps during the war had ultimately led to a continuous reduction of noble influence. These numbers, therefore, do appear to be disproportionately high.

The Struggle for the Commemoration of East Elbia

The second wave of post-war noble autobiographic production began in the late 1960s. The apologetic tone and the self-glorification of the early accounts slowly gave way to a nostalgic farewell. These works were not centred on heroic battles, political intrigues or individual exculpation. They offered instead a melancholy description of the nobility's shattered *Lebenswelten* in the East. Only now did the authors, who had grown up on the eastern estates but had not, for the most part, played prominent political or military roles in the Third Reich, evoke the remote life of East-Elbian pre-war society. The autobiographies of the second phase show how closely Prussia's ruling class

⁸⁹ Colonel William S. Nye, Chief Historian, USAREUR. Guide to Foreign Military Studies 1945–1954: Catalog and Index, Headquarters United States Army, Military Institute (Karlsruhe, 1954).

⁹⁰ In 1932, the nobility accounted for 23.8 per cent of the officer corps of the Reichswehr. By 1943, that share had fallen to a mere 7.1 per cent of the Wehrmacht. The traditionally high noble share among the generals had experienced a similar drop. Whereas in 1939, still 34 per cent of the generals had been noblemen, that share was down to 19.8 per cent by 1943. See: Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer*, p. 29.

had been attached to land and nature, and to what degree conventions and traditional rules had survived in the isolated estate societies of the most eastern provinces of the Reich.

Most importantly, however, the memoirs communicated an increasing acceptance of the loss of East Elbia. For the first time since the war, the focus was not on traumatic memories of war, destruction and expulsion, but rather on the remembrance of a peaceful and harmonious pre-war society, idealised within parameters that were common to the genre as a whole. The new wave of autobiographies detached the commemoration of the German east from the horrors of the war. It also simultaneously established a counter discourse to the claim that the regions east of the Oder-Neiße must ultimately be returned to Germany. Instead, the authors sought to create a lasting place for East Elbia within the collective memory of the nation.

The Failure of the Expellee Associations

Throughout the first two decades following the war, the claim that East Elbia must be restored to Germany had been articulated by the numerous expellee organisations. In 1950, German expellees from Eastern Europe accounted for 16.5 per cent of West Germany's population. This figure rose to more than 20 per cent in 1961, due to the mass exodus from the GDR. Hence, one in five citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany was a refugee or expellee.⁹¹ Large and superregional associations such as the Landsmannschaft

⁹¹ Helga Hirsch, *Flucht und Vertreibung – Kollektive Erinnerung im Wandel*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B 40–41/2003), pp. 18, 19.

Ostpreußen, the Vereinigte Ostdeutsche Landsmannschaften, and the Zentralverband der vertriebenen Deutschen were set up throughout Germany.⁹² By 1952, almost 3,500,000 refugees had joined an expellee association. Considering that by that time, West Germany had taken in 8,258,000 expellees, the percentage of expellees involved in an organisation thus amounted to a staggering 42 per cent.⁹³

From their origins, the main agenda of these large expellee associations was the return of the former German provinces east of the newly established Oder-Neiße line. For example, the initial charter of the Landsmannschaft Ostpreußen demanded in Article 4 to “take any appropriate action to achieve a reunification of East Prussia as a German province with a unified Reich”.⁹⁴ In 1950, various associations solemnly united to adopt the “Charta der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen”. Although therein they explicitly refrained from “revenge and retribution” the document unmistakably demanded a “right to Heimat”, which ultimately meant nothing else but a “right to return”.⁹⁵

⁹² See: Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat – Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Munich, 2008), pp. 139–144.

⁹³ Mathias Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch – Organisation, Selbstverständnis und Heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der Deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949–1972* (Düsseldorf, 2004), pp. 141–147.

⁹⁴ Dr. Jos Schnurer, Plädoyer für eine Wiederentdeckung – Rezension: “Ostpreußen. Geschichte und Mythos” von Andreas Kossert, in: *Die Berliner Literaturkritik*, 02.06.06, online at: www.berlinerliteraturkritik.de/index.php?id=26&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=12127&cHash=0b081772df%20.

⁹⁵ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, pp. 151–153.

Once they had channelled their power by setting up a united umbrella organisation called the Bund der Vertriebenen (BdV) in 1957, the expellee associations became a very powerful and influential pressure group in post-war Germany laying claim to a kind of custodianship over the remembrance of war and expulsion. When the first signs of actively accounting for Germany's guilt over its Nazi past occurred in post-war German society in the late 1950s, the BdV protested sharply: "It is with deep concern that the board of the Bund der Vertriebenen feels obliged to declare that, due to unilateral German guilt confessions and advance offers, the Federal Republic's foreign policy stance towards certain Eastern bloc countries is being irresponsibly undermined".⁹⁶ The BdV frantically tried to hold on to the common conviction that the Soviets had been solely responsible for the horrors of flight and expulsion, and that German refugees had been "victims of exorbitant retaliation".⁹⁷ Any sort of critical historiography was sharply rebuffed: "it cannot be allowed that a tendentious historiography prevails, which omits the entanglement of European nations and thereby the objective causes of the wars and revolutions of present times and constructs a German 'Alleinschuld'".⁹⁸ The post-war expulsion was declared "a crime against humanity and a violation of the basic ethical principles of our civilisation".⁹⁹ Walter Rinke, a leading expellee politician, even called it "the greatest

⁹⁶ Werner Blumenthal und Bardo Faßbender (eds), *Erklärungen zur Deutschlandpolitik. Eine Dokumentation von Stellungnahmen, Reden und Entschlüssen des Bundes der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände. Part 1: 1949–1972* (Bonn, 1984), p. 76.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 123.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 109.

⁹⁹ Die Tschechoslowakische Frage, pamphlet Sept. 1952 by the Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft, cited in: Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion – West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945–1990* (Oxford, 2003), p. 46.

collective crime in history” thereby implicitly placing the expellees’ fate on level with that of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.¹⁰⁰

Thus by the mid-1950s, a situation had arisen in which the expellee associations attempted to direct and control the remembrance of German suffering during and after the war. Largely supported by the government and generally backed by public opinion, their general stance was strongly revanchist, their tone highly aggressive, and their rhetoric staunchly anti-communist.

The East-Elbian nobility did not play a prominent role in these developments. Although the Adelsverband (Association of German Nobles) had been re-established in 1956, it did not actively intervene in public debates. In this regard, it had very little in common with its pre-war predecessor, the highly reactionary and staunchly anti-Semitic Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft (DAG).¹⁰¹ Whereas the DAG had deliberately fostered the political radicalisation of the nobility in the aftermath of defeat and revolution in 1918, the post-war Adelsverband was more apolitical and generally refrained from commenting on political issues.¹⁰² This became especially apparent in the social and political pieces published in the *Adelsblatt*. In the first decade of its existence, a mere two articles appeared

¹⁰⁰ Walter Rinke at the Heimattreffen of the Landsmannschaft Schlesien, Frankfurt a. M., 18 July 1954, cited in: Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 46.

¹⁰¹ For the role of the DAG in the Third Reich see especially: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 144–197 and pp. 321–357.

¹⁰² Conze, *Der Edelmann als Bürger?*, in: Hettling und Ulrich (eds), *Bürgertum nach 1945*, p. 348.

which primarily dealt with the role of the expellees.¹⁰³ Tellingly, one of these related to the question of whether expelled noblemen and -women were still allowed to bear their titles.

In the early post-war era, the nobility was more concerned with rebuilding and strengthening its infra-corporate identity than intervening in political debates. They tended to focus attention on family associations, noble balls, festivities and conventions.¹⁰⁴ The focus was on personal progress, overcoming financial and physical hardship and reconstructing a secure existence.¹⁰⁵ This is not to suggest that there were no nobles actively involved in expellee associations, nor that the stance of these organisations did not often align with widely held opinions among the nobility. In fact, people such as Walter von Keudell, Erik von Witzleben and Herbert von Bismarck, and later on in the 1970s, Philipp von Bismarck and Joachim von Braun, held prominent posts within these organisations.¹⁰⁶ Yet, their commitment to the

¹⁰³ Dr. Wolff Freiherr von Wrangel, Die Bedeutung der Heimatvertriebenen für die Politik der Bundesrepublik, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Juli 1960, pp. 130, 131; Otto von Bary, Heimatvertriebene erhalten die Möglichkeit, wieder ihren adeligen Namen zu führen, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, Oktober 1961, pp. 188, 189.

¹⁰⁴ For the importance of the Familienverbände see chapter IV of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Conze, Der Edelmann als Bürger?, in: Hettling und Ulrich (eds), *Bürgertum nach 1945*, pp. 369, 370.

¹⁰⁶ Walter von Keudell headed the Landsmannschaft Berlin-Mark-Brandenburg, Erik von Witzleben the Landsmannschaft Westpreußen and Joachim von Braun presided over the Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen between 1972 and 1974. Philipp von Bismarck headed the Landsmannschaft Pommern between 1970 and 1990. He was the brother of Klaus von Bismarck, a staunch opponent of the expellee associations and their adherence to East Elbia. Although Philipp von Bismarck opposed the cession of Germany's eastern territories he never fully supported the radical position of the BdV. Instead, he lastingly worked for Polish-German reconciliation and according to Herbert Czaja, the long-term president of the BdV, Bismarck "hardly represented the positions of the BdV". See: Herbert Czaja, *Unterwegs zum kleinsten Deutschland? Mangel and Solidarität mit den Vertriebenen – Marginalien zu 50 Jahren Ostpolitik* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996), p. 570.

expellee issue remained individual. There is no indication that any of them tried to portray their personal engagement within the expellee associations as being representative of the nobility as a whole.

The 1960s, saw a growing alienation between the expellee associations and the majority of the general public. Thanks in large part to the government's successful integration policy by means of the Equalisation of Burdens Act and to a thriving economy, most of the expellees were able to establish a new life in West Germany. The thought of a permanent return to East Elbia gradually lost its appeal. The younger generation scarcely maintained a close connection with the former German territories in the East. Instead German society gradually began to re-appraise the country's recent past. The conviction of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, and the subsequent Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, began to sensitise the population to the crimes committed by Germans during the Third Reich.

As a result of this growing revaluation of Germany's past, the thought of accepting history's verdict and recognising the loss of the eastern territories became more and more socially acceptable. Even leading politicians of the SPD, the same party that in the 1950s had assured the expellee associations that renouncing East Elbia was treachery, now called for "change through rapprochement".¹⁰⁷ At the end of the 1960s, this concept resulted in Germany's new *Ostpolitik*, which meant that Germany officially recognised

¹⁰⁷ Egon Bahr used this term to propose a policy of stronger cooperation between West Germany and the Communist states of Eastern Europe in a speech he gave at the Evangelical Academy in Tutzing on 15.07.1963; the speech is printed in: Boris Meißner (ed.), *Die deutsche Ostpolitik 1961–1970* (Cologne, 1970), pp. 45–48.

the Republic of Poland and acknowledged the current European borders, thereby de facto giving up German claims for East Elbia. One of the main supporters of this political strategy had been the German Protestant Church. As early as 1954, Klaus von Bismarck, former land owner and member of the committee of the German Protestant Church Congress, publicly proclaimed at the Church Convention in Leipzig: "It is my personal opinion – which some of you might not be able to agree with – that before god, we have no right to regain what he took from us, even if international and civil law might provide us with a claim".¹⁰⁸ In 1961-62, leading members of the Protestant Church addressed a memorandum to parliament calling for the official recognition of the Oder-Neiße border.¹⁰⁹ This position was powerfully reaffirmed in the so-called *Ostdenkschrift* in 1965.

Thus in the 1960s, Germany's attitude towards its former eastern territories, as well as its recent past, fundamentally changed. The younger generations revolted against the veil of silence that had carefully been placed over their parents' entanglement with the Third Reich. They were no longer willing to accept the reactionary revanchism of the 1950s and instead called for an active accountability for the past, to which end the loss of East Elbia was perceived most frequently as an inevitable punishment for German atrocities committed during the war. The realities had changed to such a degree that many regarded the mere commemoration of the expulsion as an act of revanchism which might prove detrimental to the desired process of

¹⁰⁸ Harald Schroeter, *Kirchentag als vorläufige Kirche* (Stuttgart, 1993), p. 161.

¹⁰⁹ See: Martin Greschat, *Mehr Wahrheit in der Politik! Das Tübinger Memorandum von 1961*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 48:3 (2000), pp. 491–513.

reconciliation.¹¹⁰ The unceasing, aggressive rhetoric of the expellee associations added to this perception, and as a result, not only did the name of East Elbia hold very negative connotations, but its commemoration was gradually erased from society's collective memory.

Land of Desire: the Literary Resurrection of East Elbia in Noble Memoirs

At the same time, a younger generation of nobles who had grown up on the estates in East Elbia, but had predominantly not held any higher positions under Hitler, began to reinterpret the nobility's role in pre-war Germany. For years after the war, large parts of the East-Elbian nobility – like the rest of German society – remained impervious to the realisation that their traditional way of life on the eastern estates had been irreversibly lost. Only the cultural instability of the late 1960s generated a change in perception.

Nourishing the idealised memory of a bygone era became the central strand of noble history management. The autobiographies morphed from being tools of political activism and individual exculpation into instruments for preserving the remembrance of noble *habitus* and ways of life. The memoirs became a platform to pass on the virtues, convictions and beliefs of a dispossessed and uprooted caste, to reinvent its public image in the present, but also to provide a reservoir of memory for future generations. Christian Graf von Krockow called this the “treasure box of memory”,¹¹¹ which allowed the nobility, to re-immense itself in the past and consolidate their

¹¹⁰ Hirsch, *Flucht und Vertreibung*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ Christian Graf von Krockow, *Erinnerungen – Zu Gast in drei Welten* (Munich, 2002), p. 295.

own noble identity. Monika von Zitzewitz explained: “we need the past to walk into the future. [...] If we do not tell our children where we come from, we deprive them of their roots. [...] The last survivors who still have vivid memories of the lands east of the Oder have to pass them on”.¹¹² Similarly, Hasso von Knebel-Doeberitz urged his family to write down as much as possible. “We have been robbed of almost everything. Memory is the only asset which cannot be taken away from us.”¹¹³ The same motivation encouraged Georg Graf von Schwerin to publish his memoirs. Worried that the expulsion from East Elbia would ultimately lead to the disappearance of the traditional rural noble way of life, he specifically wrote his autobiography to preserve the memory of the ordinary life of a Mecklenburg Junker in order to “prevent it from falling into oblivion within a couple of generations”.¹¹⁴

When the first nostalgic noble autobiographies appeared in the late 1960s, the commemoration of East Elbia was highly controversial. The revanchist stance of the expellee associations had created a situation in which the majority of German society now looked back on the formerly German territories east of the Oder and Neiße “as a Frenchman would look back on the loss of Indochina”.¹¹⁵ In other words, the remembrance of East Elbia was receding from view and beginning to fade into obscurity. The approach of

¹¹² Monika von Zitzewitz, Preface in: Aninka Gräfin Bellavitis, *Wir haben das Korn geschnitten – Erinnerungen aus Ostpreußen* (Munich, 2002), pp. 7, 8.

¹¹³ Hasso von Knebel-Doeberitz, *Originale, Pommersche Jagdgeschichten und anderes* (Dietersdorf, 1964), p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Georg Graf von Schwerin, *Zettemin: Erinnerungen eines mecklenburgischen Gutsherrn* (Munich, 1995), p. 10.

¹¹⁵ Alfred Heuß, *Versagen und Verhängnis. Vom Ruin deutscher Geschichte und ihres Verständnisses* (Berlin, 1984), p. 143.

commemoration adopted by the new wave of noble publications was sharply at odds with the one we have witnessed among the expellee associations. In contrast to the aggressive and defiant rhetoric of expellee representatives, noble authors now generally accepted the loss of their *Heimat*. They realised that the political realities had irrevocably changed and the only way to come to terms with their loss was to acknowledge it.

Dankwart von Arnim claimed that right after the war, he was aware of the definite loss of Sperrenwalde. "The estate was gone – I had grasped that."¹¹⁶ To Gerhard von Jordan, this realisation had come during the final days before his expulsion from Silesia in January 1945. "You are seeing this all for the very last time. You will not return – over, lost..."¹¹⁷ Alexander Prince Dohna described a similar experience when he wrote, "already at the end of the war I was fully aware that East Elbia was lost".¹¹⁸ Yet, factual realisation was one thing and actually acceptance another. Dohna refers to the *Ostdenkschrift* of the Protestant Church in 1966 as the turning point in his process of coming to terms with the loss of East Elbia. "The Protestant Church proclaimed that no more claims should be made for the territories east of the Oder and Neiße. Accepting this proved to be immensely difficult for me, but it was the price the German people had to pay for Hitler and National Socialism."¹¹⁹ It also took Marion Gräfin Dönhoff more than two decades to accept that her *Heimat* was irrevocably lost. Although from early on, she renounced any claim to regain the German territories by force, she

¹¹⁶ Dankwart von Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß* (Berlin, 1991), p. 291.

¹¹⁷ Jordan, *Unser Dorf in Schlesien*, p. 212.

¹¹⁸ Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 322.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 322.

was unwilling to renounce German claims in general. It was only the onset of *Ostpolitik* and ultimately the Warsaw Genuflection of Chancellor Brandt that made her realise that it was time to let go.¹²⁰ “Nowadays, nobody can hope any more that the lost territories will ever be German again. Those who think differently would have to dream of reconquering them by force.”¹²¹

Acknowledging the cession of East Elbia turned out to be the crucial turning point in the nobility’s approach to coming to terms with their loss. The long process of letting the past go ultimately enabled them to resurrect it in their imagination and pave the way for its entry into collective memory. Only then could the noble authors tap into the endless reservoir of memory and illustrate the fascinating details of the nobility’s rich culture and way of life, which were so deeply rooted in nature and the archaic traditions of a bygone era.¹²²

The key to the nobility’s literary resurrection of East Elbia was the transfiguration of these lost provinces into a romanticised world of a long-gone age. Pre-existing mythical and literary template shaped this process, particularly in the case of East Prussia, where many of the themes of the new wave transfigurations can already be found in the interwar period. East Prussia was the only German province during the First World War to experience wartime occupation by foreign troops. Although the Russians

¹²⁰ See her interview in the documentary: Marion Dönhoff – Die Gräfin und die Zeit, *Zeit Dokumentation* – Deutschland: Lenker und Gestalter – Große Persönlichkeiten der Bundesrepublik im Portrait, DVD Edition, 2008.

¹²¹ Ein Kreuz auf Preußens Grab, *Die Zeit*, 20.11.1970.

¹²² Funck and Malinowski, Masters of Memory, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, p. 96.

were defeated at Tannenberg and ultimately expelled from East Prussia in February 1915, the devastations were considerable. Thirty-nine cities and almost 1,900 villages were destroyed.¹²³ In 1915, an emergency appeal (*Ostpreußenhilfe*) was issued throughout the Reich to collect donations for reconstruction. Dozens of private initiatives donated money, clothes and furniture. The Münchner Ostpreußenhilfe alone collected almost half a million Reichsmark.¹²⁴

In 1919, the Allies created the Polish Corridor. Poland gained access to the Baltic Sea, but East Prussia was cut off from the Reich. When the news emerged that a plebiscite should decide on the future of the ethnically mixed regions of southern East Prussia, the wartime solidarity with Germany's most eastern province reached new heights. The propaganda surrounding the plebiscite for self-determination of the regions Allenstein and Marienwerder in 1920, transformed the referendum into a "border skirmish and a racial struggle".¹²⁵ The government erected a monstrous memorial at the site of the Tannenberg battle and the victorious commander, Field Marshall von Hindenburg, was glorified as the saviour of East Prussia. Pilgrimages to Tannenberg became a "national obligation" for every young

¹²³ "Zum Besten der Ostpreußenhilfe" – Spenden für den Wiederaufbau ab 1915, Ausstellung im Ostpreussischen Landesmuseum Lüneburg, 23.09.2006 – 28.01.2007, online at: www.ostpreussisches-landesmuseum.de/en/museum/ausstellungsarchiv/2007-2006/zum-besten-der-ostpreussenhilfe-spenden-fuer-den-wiederaufbau-ab-1915.html.

¹²⁴ Sven Felix Kellerhoff, *Heimatfront: Der Untergang der heilen Welt – Deutschland im ersten Weltkrieg* (Cologne, 2014), p. 135.

¹²⁵ Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen – Geschichte und Mythos* (Munich, 2007), p. 221.

German.¹²⁶ The German historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, had already in 1862 described East Prussia as “a breakwater thrusting from the German shore boldly into the wave-tossed sea of the eastern peoples”.¹²⁷ Now, the nationalist press took this description further by declaring East Prussia to be the bulwark against the advancing Slavdom.¹²⁸ In this process, as the Polish historian, Rafael Zytyniec, has explained, East Prussia was systematically transformed into a “specifically German landscape”.¹²⁹ In the elections of March 1933, the NSDAP gained almost sixty per cent of the votes, and in some districts, even up to eighty per cent – the highest percentage in the entire Reich.¹³⁰

The mystification of East Prussia’s landscape thus began long before the expulsions that accompanied the collapse of the Third Reich. Novels such as *Das Haus am Haff* by Hugo Marti, Fritz Kudnig’s book of poetry *Land der tausend Seen*, Jakob Schaffner’s booklets *Offenbarung in deutscher Landschaft*, *Eine Sommerfahrt* and *Ostpreußen, Stille und Kraft* and the various poems of Agnes Miegel, transformed the landscape between Vistula and Memel into a

¹²⁶ For the glorification of Tannenberg see: Mathieu Olivier, *Schlacht bei Tannenberg – Erfolg und Scheitern von Siegesmythen*, in: Hans Henning Hahn und Robert Traba (eds), *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, Volume I (Paderborn, 2015), pp. 283–300.

¹²⁷ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Origins of Prussianism (The Teutonic Knights)* (London, 1942), p. 39.

¹²⁸ Martin Sander, *Buchkritik, Bollwerk Ostpreußen*, *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 24.06.2010.

¹²⁹ Rafael Zytyniec, *Ostpreußen, Ermland und Masuren – Vom Bollwerk zur Borussia*, in: Hahn und Traba (eds), *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, p. 102.

¹³⁰ See footnote No. 283 in: Dieter Hertz-Eichenrode, *Politik und Landwirtschaft in Ostpreußen 1919–1930* (Wiesbaden, 1969), p. 69; See also: Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991), p. 39.

mystic land of desire.¹³¹ Iconic places like the *Marienburg*, *Trakehnen*, *Steinort* and *Königsberg*, as well as the unique characteristics of nature, such as in the *Kurische Nehrung*, the *Frische Haff*, the forests and lakes, became formative terms in the myth surrounding East Prussia. The survival of the elk, the iconic heraldic animal of the province, and the amber harvested from the East Prussian coast, conveyed an image of archaic nature, a kind of Prussian Siberia.¹³² The widely popular song *Oratorium an die Heimat*, composed by Herbert Brust in the early 1930s, further consolidated an image that idealised East Prussia as “the land of dark forests and clear lakes”. This song became so popular that it was renamed the *Ostpreußenlied* and replaced the traditional state-anthem.¹³³ Ironically, East Prussia had the smallest acreage of forest of all German provinces and hardly any major lakes except for the Masurian Lake District in the southern borderlands.¹³⁴

Even a cursory examination of the new-wave autobiographies reveals that the authors deliberately built on this pre-existing mystification of East Prussia. The transfiguration of this province and its landscape is omnipresent and already evident from the titles and the book covers: *East Prussian Diary*, *Country-Life in East Prussia*, *Childhood in East Prussia*, *Recollections of an old East Prussian*, *Only the Storks Remained* and *People, Horses, Wide Country*.¹³⁵ Most of

¹³¹ See: Hubert Orlowski, *Das Bild Ostpreußens in der deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Matthias Weber (ed.), *Preußen in Ostmitteleuropa – Geschehensgeschichte und Verstehensgeschichte* (Munich, 2003), p. 272 and especially footnote No. 34.

¹³² Orlowski, *Das Bild Ostpreußens in der deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 272, 273.

¹³³ See: Gerhart Seiffert, *Land der dunklen Wälder und kristall’nen Seen: Das Ostpreußenlied, seine Entstehung und sein Komponist Herbert Brust* (Bremerhaven, 1970).

¹³⁴ Wolf Lepenies, *So wurde Ostpreußen zum heiligen deutschen Osten*, *WELT*, 30.07.2010.

¹³⁵ Hans Graf von Lehndorff, *East Prussian Diary, 1945–1947* (London, 1963); Hedwig von Lölhöff, *Landleben in Ostpreußen* (Hamburg, 1973); Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Kindheit in*

the book covers feature romantic photographs of the East Prussian landscape. The most popular scenes are deserted lakes, blossoming fields, idyllic manor houses or mighty tree-lined alleys.¹³⁶

The first writer to set the tone of the nobility's nostalgic transfiguration of East Elbia was Hans Graf von Lehndorff in 1961. Although his East Prussian diary only covered the years 1944 to 1947 – he published his full autobiography in 1980 – it can be regarded as the formative work that sparked the second wave of post-war noble autobiographies. The first paragraph of this book exemplifies how the noble authors were to pick up on the myth surrounding East Prussia. “Once again, before the bulldozer of the war drove over it, my East Prussian homeland unfolded all its mysterious splendour. Whoever lived through those last months with receptive senses must have felt that never before had the light been so intense, the sky so lofty, the distance so vast. And all that impalpable essence distilled by the landscape, lending wings to the spirit, took shape with an intensity that only the hour of farewell could have given it.”¹³⁷

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, who was the second pioneer of this nostalgic farewell literature – she published her first work, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, in 1962 – approached the rediscovery of her *Heimat* in similar fashion. She uses the enigmatic beauty of East Prussia to establish a land of desire, which

Ostpreußen (Berlin, 1988); Dohna, *Erinnerungen*; Ottfried Graf von Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben* (Munich, 1994); Hans Graf von Lehndorff, *Menschen, Pferde, weites Land* (Munich, 1980).

¹³⁶ The covers frequently changed over the years. Most of these books saw numerous editions. Yet almost all of the above mentioned appeared with variations of East Prussian landscape scenes.

¹³⁷ Lehndorff, *East Prussian Diary*, p.1.

is worth being remembered. “Naturally, everyone who felt at home there reminisces about the beautiful landscape – the endless meadows and fields beneath the grand eastern sky; the secluded forests and clear lakes. [...] No one who ever galloped astride a noble steed across the fields of stubble, tracing a slalom among the hay stack, will ever call any other place but East Prussia their Heimat.”¹³⁸

Out of such prose the place-myth of East Prussia was woven. The concept of the ‘place-myth’ as a way of characterising “the skein of expectations, hopes, stereotypes and associations attached to a place” is useful here, because it alludes to a collective process by which a particular landscape or locality acquires a stable set of attributes so dominant that they displace to some extent the reality of the place in question and perpetuate themselves in a manner that may be quite autonomous from the experience of individuals. Rather than capturing impressions from the past, a place-myth may retro-project itself onto the remembered space.¹³⁹ It was almost as if the noble authors had collectively agreed in advance to resurrect the mythical East Prussia in West German collective memory by deploying a shared repertoire of tropes. Alexander Prince Dohna fondly recalled the wintery hunting season. “In complete silence we glided through the softly glistening, snow-capped East Prussian countryside.”¹⁴⁰ He reports on the sighting of a bear in

¹³⁸ Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, Preface – Bemerkungen zur Geschichte Ostpreußens, in: Adelaide von Eulenburg und Hans Engels, *Ostpreußische Gutshäuser in Polen. Gegenwart und Erinnerung* (Munich, 1987), p. 11.

¹³⁹ On place-myth as a key to understanding collective responses to a symbolically charged locality, see Nina Lübbren, *Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe, 1870–1914* (Manchester, 2001), p. 115–7.

¹⁴⁰ Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 49.

the East Prussian wilderness and depicts the remoteness of the Masurian Lake District as an Eldorado for waterfowl.¹⁴¹ For Aninka Gräfin von Bellavitis, it was the East Prussian sky which stood out, since “it appeared to be much closer, the stars sparkled like gold, and one was almost certain they were in reach”.¹⁴² Hans Graf von Lehndorff portrayed his *Heimat* as a ‘borderland’: “the wind from there moved the heart, the spirit tempted one’s readiness to make sacrifices. It was not a neutral life one lived there. One was needed”.¹⁴³ Otfried Graf von Finckenstein affectionately remembered the “rattling of the storks” and was overwhelmed by “the light summer sky of the east, which was always bright, from horizon to horizon”.¹⁴⁴ Marion Dönhoff accentuated East Prussia’s wilderness even further by setting it in contrast with the industrial pollution of the 1960s. “In such a world birds, otters, martens and polecats still had their place, which today’s assiduously economising society deprives them of. The sea eagle, crane and large curlew found remote breeding areas, and alongside fields and paths grew poppies and cornflowers, not having to elude death by myriad chemicals.”¹⁴⁵

Other noble authors picked up these themes and extended the technique to East Elbia as a whole. Although the depictions of the natural beauty of Pomerania and Silesia were not as exuberant as those of East Prussia, they still conveyed an image of a melancholic and pristine lost world. Thus Dankwart Graf von Arnim indulged in the memory of Lake Zervelien,

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 157, 158, 152.

¹⁴² Bellavitis, *Wir haben das Korn geschnitten*, p. 92.

¹⁴³ Lehndorff, *Menschen, Pferde, weites Land*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, pp. 7, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt* (Munich, 2000), p. 7.

“which was situated in the middle of the dark forest and still possessed the aura of deep and uninhabited seclusion”.¹⁴⁶ For Franz von Unruh “the summer [in the East] gleamed in an infinite blue [...] and upon the leaves’ subtle change in colour, when the wine was suffused with crimson, when storms broke and covered paths with leaves drenched in rainwater, then the inimitable scent of autumn began to suffuse the air”.¹⁴⁷ Klaus von Bismarck reminisced about “snow-drifted farm roads, covered by willow trees, which at nightfall melancholically stood out from the crusted snow cover”.¹⁴⁸ For Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff the “wild and therefore particularly beautiful landscape of the *Riesengebirge*” formed the basis for his “immutable love for his Silesian *Heimat*”.¹⁴⁹

Redrafting the Popular Image of the East-Elbian Nobility

Onto this nostalgic land of desire the noble authors plotted the redrafted image of the East-Elbian nobility. For decades, the Junkers had been at the centre of a widespread *Adelskritik*, notoriously propagated in satirical magazines such as *Simplicissimus*.¹⁵⁰ Here the Junkers were portrayed as ruthless agrarian capitalists, “who ruled their workers with the authority and

¹⁴⁶ Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁷ Friedrich Franz von Unruh, *Ehe die Stunde schlägt – Kindheitserinnerungen* (Bodensee, 1967), p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Klaus von Bismarck, *Aufbruch aus Pommern: Erinnerungen und Perspektiven* (Munich, 1992), p. 14.

¹⁴⁹ Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang* (Frankfurt a. M., 1977), p. 23.

¹⁵⁰ See: Reif, Die Junker, in: Francois und Schulze (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, pp. 523, 524.

the style of Prussian officers".¹⁵¹ Yet, in the second half of the twentieth century, this widely popular pre-war characterisation of the dashing East-Elbian Junker, meticulously subjugating the people on his estates, had gradually faded into obscurity. The expulsion of the nobility had simply made it superfluous. What we see instead is a predominant focus on the nobility's role in Weimar and Nazi politics.

As we recounted in the introduction to this thesis, historians such as Hans Rosenberg, Heinrich-August Winkler and Hans-Ulrich Wehler staunchly attacked the Junkers for being heavily responsible for leading Germany down its fateful path in the twentieth century.¹⁵² The Bielefeld School constructed their *Sonderweg*-theory around the failure to destroy the social and political power of Germany's 'traditional elites'. As Germany's most powerful elite, the East-Elbian nobility was at the heart of these debates. They were regarded as the driving force behind building up an anti-republican Reichswehr, which was eager to forcefully revise the Treaty of Versailles. They were also impugned with having significantly assisted Hitler's rise to power by having sought a formal coalition with the National Socialist movement as early as in the winter of 1932-33.¹⁵³

It was a distinguishing feature of the new wave of noble publications that they did not respond directly to this criticism, but sought instead to shift the focus from the political role of the nobility towards its cultural and social responsibility in pre-war Germany. Rather than addressing the role of the

¹⁵¹ Bismarck, *Aufbruch aus Pommern*, p. 30.

¹⁵² See the section *State of Research* in the Introduction of this thesis.

¹⁵³ Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Volume 4, pp. 326–332.

nobility in the political transformations of East Prussia in the late Weimar and Nazi years, they created a space outside history, a space filled with endless charming anecdotes of a peaceful and harmonious hierarchical social system built upon Prussian virtues and moral integrity and kept together by the special bond between the squire and his people. In other words, the noble publicists drew the portrait of an indulgent Junker archetype, firmly anchored in an archaic social system so stable that it 'protected' East-Elbian society from the enticements of National Socialism.

These memoirs led the reader on an extensive tour through the *Lebenswelten* of the East-Elbian nobility. The writers symbolically opened their manor houses to the public. Once inside, the reader encountered a carefully curated exhibition intended to portray the immaculate image of a lenient, tolerant and humble local elite, sheltered from the vicissitudes of politics. The setting is generally a picturesque manor house, surrounded by a spacious park lined with ancient trees and an idyllic pond. The estates are predominantly autarchic often including sawmills, dairies and fish farms.¹⁵⁴ The noble children are playing with the village youth, the servants tend to be the nobles' best friends and class distinctions seem to be non-existent.¹⁵⁵ "The lordship's children were barefoot like those of the workers, sat on the same horse carts at times of harvest and drew them in for play in the manor's park.

¹⁵⁴ Maria Gräfin von Maltzan, *Schlage die Trommel und fürchte dich nicht – Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 2009), p. 12; Also see Marion Gräfin Dönhoff's chapter, "Self-Sufficiency", in: *Before the Storm: Memories of my Youth in Old Prussia* (New York, 1990), pp. 65–70.

¹⁵⁵ See: Lehndorff, *Menschen*, p. 15; Lölhöff, *Ostpreußen*, p. 35; Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 19; Esther Gräfin von Schwerin, *Kormorane, Brombeerranken, Erinnerungen an Ostpreußen* (Munich, 2009), p. 28.

Nobody envied the life in the stately homes.”¹⁵⁶ Omnipresent throughout the autobiographies is also the nobility’s fervour for horses and hunting. Every young nobleman- and woman learns from early on how to ride a horse and handle a rifle. Extended anecdotes of multi-generational hunting adventures, stalking techniques passed down by generations and carefully nurtured and cultivated game preserves show the reader how closely the nobility’s lifestyle was connected to land and nature and by implication how far it was removed from urban modernity.¹⁵⁷

Despite the privileged setting, the upbringing of the children is invariably depicted as “specifically simple, almost Spartan”.¹⁵⁸ We see Count Finckenstein, the owner of vast estates in East Prussia, denying his son even the minimum allowance suggested by the boarding school, to make him accustomed with, as he put it, being part of the less well off.¹⁵⁹ Klaus von Bismarck remembered that only on special occasions, if ever, a lamb was especially killed for the squire’s family. The rest of the year the family lived off the leftovers from the farm, just like any other family.¹⁶⁰ Marion Dönhoff recalled that in her childhood she was “never allowed to put both butter and jam on her bread” because it was considered too lavish. She and her siblings “never travelled second class on the railroad (first class was not to be thought

¹⁵⁶ Lölhöff, *Ostpreußen*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁷ See: Lehndorff, *Menschen*, p. 25; Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 152-158; Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, pp. 99-106; Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, pp. 54-56.

¹⁵⁸ Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, pp. 66–69.

¹⁶⁰ Bismarck, *Aufbruch aus Pommern*, p. 74; also see: Schwerin, *Kormorane*, p. 26; Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, p. 39.

of), but sat on the hard wooden benches of third class, even for trips as long as from Königsberg to Berlin".¹⁶¹

Yet, austerity was not the only virtue the nobility claimed as a family heirloom. They invoked the entire catalogue of the so-called "Prussian virtues": honesty, punctuality, loyalty, self-reliance, responsibility, bravery, courage, modesty and discipline. These were the pole star that guided generations of young nobles through the turbulent waters of political change. Thus Klaus von Bismarck spoke for his entire class when he claimed, "the virtues that the Prussian kings demanded from their subjects have always taken priority".¹⁶² Throughout his childhood, Alexander zu Dohna was urged by his grandfather to take responsibility. "From an early age on, every young man from a decent family shall strive to distinguish himself as a leader among his peers, through his diligence, skill and competence."¹⁶³ Self-discipline, the necessity never to "lose control",¹⁶⁴ was another key theme in these autobiographies. As Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff declared "modesty and posture were the key values our parents tried to instil in us".¹⁶⁵ Their whole upbringing "was guided by the principle of what one should do and, more important, what one should not do".¹⁶⁶ Again and again, we see the young noble children on horseback with their parents, grandparents or aunts and uncles eventually falling off the horse and being left behind. Even a broken arm could not stop them from re-saddling and accepting this with

¹⁶¹ Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, p. 11.

¹⁶² Bismarck, *Aufbruch aus Pommern*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁴ Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁵ Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, p. 39.

grace and utmost restraint, and acquiescing it as an important life lesson.¹⁶⁷ As Marion Dönhoff called it, “tolerating pain without complaining was part of our honour code”.¹⁶⁸

This image of impeccable moral integrity is further fostered by the omnipresent transfiguration of the squire’s care for the local community. The authors explicitly countered the widely caricatured image of the pre-war era of the dashing Junker who meticulously subjugated his people. At the bottom of these vignettes once again lies a strategic transfiguration of another Prussian virtue the East-Elbian nobility customarily claimed heirloom to, the concept of loyalty. Traditionally, this virtue found its expression in the close relationship between the nobility and the Prussian kings. However, in the absence of a Hohenzollern monarch, this unconditional loyalty is now skilfully transferred onto the relationship between squire and peasant. “The so-called patriarchal relationship between peasants and servants, squires and farm labourers, often revealed in use of traditional conventions and titles, has been frequently misinterpreted. There was no ‘suppression’ and ‘servility’” Hedwig von Lölhöff argued.¹⁶⁹ According to Georg Graf von Schwerin the squires “considered their people particularly entrusted to their care by fate and god”. In return, the landowners were assured of the “love and endless trust of the people”.¹⁷⁰ Throughout the extracts, these nobles defended their people if they came into

¹⁶⁷ Lehdorff, *Menschen*, p. 145; Maltzan, *Schlage die Trommel*, p. 14, Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 21, Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, p. 53.

¹⁶⁸ Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ Lölhöff, *Ostpreußen*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁰ Schwerin, *Zettemin*, p. 16.

conflict with the law; they cared for the Russian prisoners of war; and invariably proved to be generous in times of despair.¹⁷¹ Even the renovation of farmer cottages took priority over the redecoration of the manor house, and it goes without saying that the hyperinflation of the early 1920s was not abused to extend the west wing or undertake journeys to exotic countries, but rather, to improve the living conditions of local workers.¹⁷² Even highly controversial personalities, such as Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, one of the most notorious advocates of the conservative elites in East Elbia and a prominent member of the Hindenburg Camarilla, are portrayed as loving old grandfathers whose life was mainly taken up by “advising his people and helping them back on their feet, [...] often by means of paying their debts”.¹⁷³ The fact that the very same Oldenburg had some decades earlier boasted of restoring order on his estate by threatening “to beat the hell”¹⁷⁴ out of an insurgent peasant was now studiously forgotten.

Yet, as much as these autobiographies were intended to rebuild and reshape the image of the nobility and ensure its survival in Germany’s collective memory, they were also subtle attempts to reassure this bewildered class of its unbroken connection with a unique past. What we see in these accounts is an unresolved tension between the image of an austere, indulgent and tolerant elite, closely attached to land and people, and the continual claim of social superiority. Between the lines, these accounts are interspersed with

¹⁷¹ See: Bismarck, *Aufbruch aus Pommern*, pp. 61–64; Schwerin, *Zettemin*, p. 16; Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, pp. 14–18; Lehdorff, *Menschen* pp. 147–149; Schwerin, *Kormorane*, pp. 14–16; Lölhöfel, *Ostpreußen*, pp. 28, 29.

¹⁷² Schwerin, *Zettemin*, p. 24.

¹⁷³ Lehdorff, *Menschen*, p. 152.

¹⁷⁴ Oldenburg, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 207–209.

anecdotes of lavish dinner parties,¹⁷⁵ liveried servants,¹⁷⁶ richly furnished manor houses,¹⁷⁷ and subtle hints at insurmountable social hierarchies, all designed to provide an endless reservoir of symbolic social capital to cherish and maintain the nobility's habitus in the present.

The often-quoted anecdotes of noble children playing with the village youth are exemplary in this context.¹⁷⁸ Although at first glance, such informal social intercourse is displayed as an expression of social proximity within the estate society, in reality, it is rather an indication of social distance designed to prepare the young noble children for their future role as leaders of their local communities.¹⁷⁹ An old family picture of the Dönhoff children, albeit involuntarily, exemplifies this. Two Dönhoff sons on ponies, formally dressed in Hussars uniforms and equipped with small sabres, are shown commanding a unit of informally dressed village boys armed with simple wooden swords.¹⁸⁰

The same ambivalence is expressed in Hans von Lehdorff's account of a Christmas party during his youth. All the village children were invited to the manor house to celebrate together. They all received small gifts, even in

¹⁷⁵ Schwerin, *Kormorane*, p. 27; Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, p. 40; Maltzahn, *Schlage die Trommel*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, pp. 3–8; Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 65; Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 144.

¹⁷⁷ Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 292–305; Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, pp. 30–38; Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, pp. 137–139; Maltzahn, *Schlage die Trommel*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ See: Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 107; Lehdorff, *Menschen*, p. 142, 143; Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 19; Schwerin, *Kormorane*, p. 28; Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁰ Dönhoff, *Before the Storm*, p. 54.

times of despair. At the end of the ceremony, the children were allowed to pick cookies and pastries from the Christmas tree, and the squire's children, from an elevated position, threw the leftovers into the bulk of the children.¹⁸¹

Dankwart von Arnim's memoirs also fondly depict his childhood friendships with the village boys, a world allegedly free of class distinctions and social hierarchies. Yet, the incidental remark about the golden-edged plate and the distinct mug he was presented with when having lunch at some of his friends' house again quietly draws attention to the elevated character of the author's social milieu.¹⁸²

A final crucial step in the process of remodelling the image of the Junkers was the effort to distance the East-Elbian nobility from the Nazi regime. Throughout the autobiographies, it is suggested that the noble families remained aloof from the machinations of the regime. The Nazis were commonly referred to as "hooligans"¹⁸³ or upstarts of "disgusting behaviour"¹⁸⁴ and Hitler was described as an "obnoxious and bloated plebeian"¹⁸⁵ who should be admitted to a mental institution. The rowdiness and coarseness of the Nazi movement supposedly discouraged the nobility from finding an arrangement with Hitler. In this respect, these autobiographies differed little from their predecessors in the immediate post-war era. What is noticeable, however, is that most of the new generation of authors simply denied flat out any sort of involvement in the Third Reich.

¹⁸¹ Lehndorff, *Menschen*, p.43.

¹⁸² Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 108.

¹⁸³ Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 134; Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁴ Schwerin, *Zettemin*, p. 135.

¹⁸⁵ Gersdorff, *Soldat im Untergang*, p. 67.

The references to National Socialism were no longer apologetic or repentant but rather declaratory. There was no deeper accounting for the issue. Instead, a widespread anti-Nazi attitude is simply presupposed as a matter of course among the entirety of the local nobility. Exemplary in this context is Gerhard von Jordan, who declared: "We, our friends and neighbours, were not Nazis. There were exceptions, an informer, a party functionary and a few committed disciples, but those were scarce. The majority of squires and their families were sceptical: instead of speaking of the Führer, one spoke of Hitler and no offices were held in the party or its subdivisions".¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Wend Graf von Eulenburg-Hertefeld remarked, "everybody had already – directly or indirectly – raised criticism, uttered defeatist comments, doubted final victory or condemned the treatment of the Jews".¹⁸⁷ Georg Graf von Schwerin conveyed the same image in several short anecdotes. He claims to have been annoyed by the Nazis' attempts to infiltrate the rural societies, and adds: "it goes without saying that I, like my neighbours, declined to acquire a Reich Hunting Uniform: the oldest hat shot best, and white tie was the most befitting dress for any hunting dinner".¹⁸⁸ Schwerin and his neighbouring squires supposedly never attended the ostentatious harvest festivals of the Nazis: "it sufficed to command one of the workers to go and cover his cost of travel. Nobody went voluntarily".¹⁸⁹ Dankwart von Arnim expressed the same aloofness in a more subtle way by referring to a picture of Hindenburg with the devoutly bowing Hitler in front of him, which

¹⁸⁶ Jordan, *Unser Dorf in Schlesien*, p. 189.

¹⁸⁷ Wend Graf von Eulenburg-Hertefeld, *Ein Schloss in der Mark Brandenburg* (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 146.

¹⁸⁸ Schwerin, *Zettemin*, p. 136.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

occupied a prominent place in “our and many other noble houses”. “On the one hand it was compulsory to have a picture of Hitler, on the other hand, it was believed that Hitler’s bow reflected the actual realities.”¹⁹⁰

It may well be that these vignettes authentically illustrate the attitudes and convictions of the time. But the memoirs are so heavily interspersed with oppositional anecdotes that the reader almost gets the impression that the entirety of the East-Elbian nobility had been staunchly opposed to National Socialism. This effect is reinforced by the fact that most authors simply withheld most compromising information about their relatives and friends, which thereby gradually made their way into oblivion. Consequently, even though many of these anecdotes might be authentic, they often only tell half of the story, as the examples of Ottfried Graf von Finkenstein and Marion Gräfin Dönhoff show.

In one of the chapters of his autobiography, Finckenstein depicts his encounter with one of his brother’s gardeners at the ancient family seat Schönberg. The gardener had been an early supporter of the regime. “He showed me his brown shirt, which he had strategically hid in the bee hive, where no one else dared to come. It was evident that he felt caught on forbidden grounds, as a member of an organisation, of which his lordship was not allowed to know.”¹⁹¹ Although not explicitly expressed, this anecdote is intended to convey the idea that the Finckensteins were inherently anti-Nazi and thereby would not tolerate the gardener’s support

¹⁹⁰ Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 120.

¹⁹¹ Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, p. 229.

for the new regime. What the autobiography, however, does not tell us is, the fact that Finckenstein's brother and sister in law were early and ardent supporters of Hitler and the party. Even before the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933, Hitler and Göring had both been personally invited to Schönberg. East Prussia's notorious Gauleiter Erich Koch was also a frequent visitor in the years to come.¹⁹²

Marion Dönhoff's denial of the actual realities are, at times, even more grotesque when she declared in her memoirs: "it goes without saying that none of the new brown men – neither important, nor minor – ever set foot into Friedrichstein palace or, all the more certain, ever felt at home there".¹⁹³ She may be true that no "important" Nazi of the likes of Hitler, Himmler or Goering set foot in her ancestral home, but it is undeniable that several 'minor' Nazis not only crossed the doorstep of Friedrichstein palace, but also felt at home there. The most prominent examples were her two brothers, Dieter and Christoph Dönhoff. The former joined the NSDAP in May 1933, although his descendants claim even today that he only joined to "keep harm from the Dönhoffs and their estate".¹⁹⁴ Christoph joined the party in 1935 and was also a member of the Gestapo. In 1942, he became head of the Rechtsamt in Paris, which was responsible for the repatriation of Germans living abroad (*Reichsdeutsche*). In this capacity, he also oversaw the deportation of German

¹⁹² Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 374.

¹⁹³ Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, p. 197.

¹⁹⁴ Klaus Harpprecht, *Die Gräfin, Marion Dönhoff – Eine Biographie* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2008), p. 154.

Jews who had fled to France. In June of 1944, he joined the Waffen-SS.¹⁹⁵ Another frequent visitor was Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff who was one of Marion Dönhoff's closest friends and who gained posthumous prominence for his participation in Stauffenberg's attempted coup at the Wolfsschanze in July 1944. Both Marion Dönhoff and his cousin, Hans Graf von Lehndorff, wrote extensive appraisals of this man, portraying him as a shining example of noble integrity who had masterfully rebuilt the family estate in East Prussia and personally taken action against Hitler in 1944.¹⁹⁶ What both authors, however, studiously ignore, is the fact that this man had joined the NSDAP as early as 1932 and built up a local party chapter (*Ortsgruppe*) in East Prussia, over which he also presided.¹⁹⁷

Yet, the noble authors not only attempted to presuppose a firm anti-Nazi attitude among the nobility, but systematically extended this conjecture to the whole of rural East Elbia. Thereby the writers of these autobiographies once again illustrate that their works were not solely designed to redraft the image of the nobility, but attempt to resurrect East Elbia in the collective memory of German society. At the heart of this concept is once again the allegedly special bond between the Junker and his people. Since the Junkers were customarily anti-Nazis, or so the story goes, their people were inevitably anti-Nazis as well, since they trusted their lord more than the

¹⁹⁵ Helga Cazas, *Auf Wiedersehen in Paris – Als jüdische Immigrantin in Frankreich 1938–1945* (Frankfurt a. M., 2005), p. 157.

¹⁹⁶ See: Lehndorff, *Menschen*, pp. 283–287; Dönhoff's chapter: *Leben und Sterben eines ostpreußischen Edelmannes*, in: *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, pp. 81–98; Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre Willen*, pp. 140–153.

¹⁹⁷ Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff, Membership Number: 367072, Entry into the NSDAP: 01.11.1930, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, NSDAP-Gaukartei (previously Berlin Document Center).

enticements of the Nazis. The estate societies of the East were refashioned into apolitical islands far removed from the vicissitudes of politics. In the countryside, the dark clouds of Nazism were barely recognisable. "In Sperrenwalde of the 1930s, one could merely catch a glimpse of it. It was more of an anxiety, an undefined fear, which arose in conversations with friends from Berlin, who spoke of the Confessing Church or the night of the long knives. The countryside remained secluded islands where nothing had changed for the past one hundred years [...] and everything proceeded amidst the old, unquestionable structures."¹⁹⁸

Nazism was portrayed as a phenomenon of urban circles. In the countryside, Nazism only appealed to some "idealists" and "eternally malcontents". Only non-locals or workers who had just recently joined the estate participated in the local SA-chapter.¹⁹⁹ In some cases, this aversion went so far that the squire had to force one of his workers to attend a compulsory party gathering in the nearby district town, since nobody wanted to follow the instructions of the party. Hans Lehndorff described the East Prussian countryside in the 1930s as "peaceful as a graveyard". "Here, the new spirit hardly found any fertile ground."²⁰⁰

How fabricated this narrative of the apolitical countryside in East Elbia was is clear not only from the enormous electoral success of the NSDAP in East Prussia, but also from the refreshingly balanced account of Alexander Fürst zu Dohna-Schlobitten. Unlike the majority of his peers, he refrained from

¹⁹⁸ Arnim, *Als Brandenburg noch die Mark hieß*, p. 136.

¹⁹⁹ Schwerin, *Zettemin*, pp. 117–125.

²⁰⁰ Lehndorff, *Menschen*, p. 177.

systematically transfiguring the political and social realities of pre-war East Elbia and instead not only openly disclosed his early membership in the SS, but also critically accounted for the wrong path Germany took as a whole in the 1930s.²⁰¹ Dohna-Schlobitten recalled the overwhelming excitement and enthusiasm that encompassed the whole of German society. “In the summer of 1933, Christian Prince Lippe and his beautiful wife Echen, *née* von Trotha, came to visit us at Schlobitten. As so many of our friends in those days, both were ardent supporters of Hitler. We often took the car to show our guests the East Prussian countryside; again and again Christian raised his arm for the Hitler salute and everywhere, on fields and in villages, people eagerly returned the gesture. Everybody seemed relieved from a heavy burden. This enthusiasm also infected my wife and me and both of us happily joined in.”²⁰² Yet, such insight into the actual social realities remained the absolute exception among East-Elbian autobiographies. The majority confined themselves to conveying a narrow image of a nostalgic land of desire in order to create a narrative that was worth being remembered.

Conclusion

The second post-war wave of noble autobiographies profoundly changed the public perception of the East-Elbian nobility and transformed East Elbia into a nostalgic land of desire. By the end of this metamorphosis, the imperious *Herrenmensch* who exploited and subjugated his workers had made way for

²⁰¹ See his chapter in his autobiography *Politische Erfahrungen (1919-1939)*, in: Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 163–188.

²⁰² Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 172.

the indulgent and altruistic squire organically connected to the life of the land and its people.

This chapter, like most of this dissertation, has focused on what we might describe as the 'supply-side' of public memory. It has discussed and analysed the autobiographical texts written by members of the East-Elbian nobility, with a view to better understanding the strategies they developed in order to purge the nobility of the negative ballast inherited from the Nazi past. The very existence of these texts, is, of course, to some extent evidence of their public salience, in the sense that their appearance under well-known imprints reflected assumptions shared by authors, editors and marketing experts about the broader resonance and likely public reception of these works. I return below to the role of the publishers.

But it has to be concluded that there remains a problem with reception. This chapter has not succeeded in quantifying the impact and success of noble efforts to improve the public image of their social group. We have seen how varied, how intensive and how consistent the activities of the noblemen and -women were. But we have had to infer, rather than demonstrating, their impact on the broader society. The reason lies above all in the paucity of pertinent sources. This may seem an odd complaint in a work of twentieth century history, an era supposedly characterised by a superfluity of sources. But the fact remains that while tracing the background, inception and content of books and television programmes is relatively easy, quantifying their impact is not.

My efforts to track down readers' letters to publishing houses in respect of the more important relevant titles from the 1960s to 1990s were in vain, since the publishers in question do not retain accessible collections of such letters. The depositories that did exist have been outsourced and broken up and are now very difficult to trace.²⁰³ One can of course, consult the readers' letters logged online by internet booksellers such as Amazon. And this, admittedly rather exiguous body of texts does, if it is true, suggest that readers were prepared to buy into positively-framed narratives of noble life in the East. L. Moeller praised "the solidarity of lordship, land and people; the responsibility and welfare of the squire in the old rural society are being vividly portrayed."²⁰⁴ The special bond between squire and people also impressed Heidemarie Krause. She stated that especially the nobility's "sense of responsibility, which the youth has been instilled with from the very beginning, is depicted particularly well".²⁰⁵ Admiration for noble responsibility was also at the heart of Philipp Wildenbruch's review of Alexander Prince Dohna's autobiography. "Count Alexander is a role model unlike few other. He lived up to his responsibility until the very end and sacrificed himself for his peasants, who had been the prerequisite for his and

²⁰³ Personal correspondence with the Diederichs, Rowohlt and Rautenberg publishing house.

²⁰⁴ L. Moeller, *Lesenswerte Geschichte Ostpreußens vom Kaiser bis nach 1945*, 04.10.2000, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/344272435X/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=recent

²⁰⁵ Heidemarie Krause, *Frei und unbekümmert – im Einklang mit der Natur*, 30.04.2016, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3442722659/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful

his forefathers' fortune."²⁰⁶ B. Preuschoff suggested that everybody should read Marion Countess Dönhof's books "in order to understand that Prussia does not represent the cliché of dull militaristic stubbornness but a very special *Heimat*, especially cherished by those who had lived there."²⁰⁷ And another anonymous reader - somewhat surprised - stated, "there were indeed noble families who for centuries served the public well. In terms of duty and decency today's politicians could certainly learn a lot from them."²⁰⁸

What is noticeable about these readers' letters is the fact that most, whether or not they refer to the issues raised in this thesis, are enthusiastically positive. Only very rarely is there a sceptical comment questioning the "seemingly idyllic world"²⁰⁹ of East-Elbia and identifying the authors' attempts to "transfigure the role of the East-Prussian nobility and the feudal society which had been very much intact until 1945".²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Philipp Wildenbruch, Rezension, 11.06.2012, online at: http://www.buecher.de/shop/buecher/erinnerungen-eines-alten-ostpreussen/dohna-schlobitten-alexander-fuerst-zu/products_products/detail/prod_id/20779426/

²⁰⁷ B. Preuschoff, Ostpreußen-Heimat, 04.03.2004, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3896314416/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful

²⁰⁸ Unknown, Vor diesem Junker habe ich absolut Hochachtung bekommen, 19.04.2001, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/344272435X/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=recent

²⁰⁹ Unknown, War es wirklich so?, 14.02.2006, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3442722659/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful

²¹⁰ Hans Peter Roentgen, Erinnerungen an ein verlorenes Land, eine verlorene Zeit, 22.03.2007, online at: https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3896314416/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_summary?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful

But these letters only start, for obvious reasons, in the late 1990s. Reviews of the noble autobiographies in the print media are strikingly rare and generally only appear in relation to books about the best-known families. But these, too, offer thin pickings. They tend to deal with specific issues of the autobiography, filleting the book under review for memorable scenes and vignettes, but they do not generally comment on the changing image of the nobility or broadcast the writer's personal view of the nobility as a social caste.²¹¹ The conclusions we draw on the basis of such sources must therefore remain tentative.

Television is a less helpful venue than one might have hoped. There was a flood of television documentaries in the early 2000s, triggered by the return of some families to their ancestral estates after the fall of the wall – I discuss these in chapter five. But television treatments of the twentieth-century East-Elbian nobility are very thin before 1989. On the other hand, the enormous popularity of the film *Die Flucht* does vividly demonstrate the resonance of the pro-nobility narrative with the broader German public. With more than eleven million viewers in 2007, it proved to be the most successful film in the ARD in more than a decade.²¹² It tells the story of Countess Mahlenberg, a courageous and indulgent noblewoman who returns to East Prussia during the final stages of the war to take over the management of her paternal estate. She rides through dark forests and lush fields, attends opulent dinner

²¹¹ See here: Freudig mit dem Hitler-Gruß: Aufrichtige Erinnerung eines alten Ostpreußen, *ZEIT*, 19.01.1990.; Immer im Aufbruch: Ein reiches Leben – Die Erinnerungen des pommerschen Dickschädels, *ZEIT*, 06.03.1992; Maria Gräfin von Maltzahn, *ZEIT*, 01.04.1994.

²¹² See: Überwältigender Erfolg für das ARD Geschichtsdrama, *Presseportal*, 05.03.2007; "Die Flucht", Erfolgreichster ARD Film seit 10 Jahren, *WELT*, 05.03.2007.

parties and devotedly cares for her workers. In the face of the advancing Red Army, she once more rises to the occasion. She meticulously plans and organises the evacuation of her entire estate, rejects the call to hang on from die-hard Nazi officials, and dutifully leads the trek to Bavaria.²¹³

The parallels with the widely-known autobiography of Marion Dönhoff are unmistakable. With a perhaps unsurprising lack of historical sophistication, the film broadcasts the image of an apolitical elite instinctively opposed to National Socialism. Yet, the scriptwriters – one of them coincidentally being Dönhoff's niece Tatjana Dönhoff – did not leave it at that. They expanded the already highly embellished narrative of the East-Elbian nobility by having Countess Mahlenberg, the fictitious equivalent of Countess Dönhoff, lead the trek and guide her people through the perils of collapsing Germany. In reality, Dönhoff had abandoned 'her people' and escaped on horseback from the approaching armies of the Soviet Union.²¹⁴ As a consequence, the claim – entirely false – that nobles had predominantly directed the great westward treks was added to the burnished image of the nobility's role in the first half of the twentieth century.²¹⁵ In this way, Tatjana Dönhoff followed in the footsteps of her aunt who had proclaimed decades earlier: "in the end it is not the facts that are determinative but the perception people derive from

²¹³ See: Die Flucht, ARD, 04.03.2007.

²¹⁴ See: Marion Dönhoff, *Nach Osten fuhr keiner mehr*, in: Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, pp. 7–34.

²¹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche auf der Flucht*, Interview for Titel, Thesen, Temperamente, ARD, 25.02.2007. For examples where noblemen actually directed entire treks see for example: Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 260–291 or the typewritten account of Franz-Adalbert Freiherr von Rosenberg, Bericht über den Treck 1945, provided to the author of this thesis by Adalbert Freiherr von Rosenberg.

these facts”.²¹⁶ The audience of more than eleven million viewers are a strong indication that Marion Dönhoff was right, though the sources do not allow us to enquire further into how exactly viewers responded to what they saw. The historians were sceptical of course: in an interview for *Deutschlandfunk*, Heinrich Schwendemann called the film’s depiction of the nobility “utterly exaggerated and misrepresented” and a commentary by the online critic Peter Röntgen lamented the crass discrepancies between the events depicted in the film and the actual facts of Dönhoff’s flight from the east, noting that the few Nazis featured in the film appeared as detached from the lives of the East Elbian elites as invading aliens from outer space.²¹⁷ But there is no reason to believe that these views – published after the film had already gone to air – had any bearing on the public enthusiasm for the topic evidenced by the extraordinary viewing figures.

Yet, the most powerful indicator of the public’s willingness to acquiesce in the nobility’s depiction of East-Elbia are the sales numbers of the noble autobiographies. Over the years, books like *Namen die keiner mehr nennt* or *Before the Storm: Memories of My Youth in Old Prussia* by Marion Dönhoff have been reprinted dozens of times. Hans von Lehndorff’s *East Prussian Diary* achieved thirty-three editions in the Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (DTV) alone. Numerous additional editions were printed by other publishing houses. The reprints of Esther von Schwerin’s and Alexander zu Dohna’s

²¹⁶ Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre Willen*, pp. 19, 20.

²¹⁷ See: the interview with the historian Heinrich Schwendemann who called the film’s depiction of the nobility “utterly exaggerated and misrepresented”, in: “*Das stimmt hinten und vorne nicht*” – Historiker kritisiert “*Die Flucht*”, *Deutschlandfunk*, 05.03.2007; Also see the review of Hans Peter Röntgen, online at: www.literatur-fast-pur.de/HP/3flucht.html.

memoirs also reached double figures over the years.²¹⁸ The exact numbers are unfortunately difficult to obtain, since the publishers are reluctant to make these figures public. Matters are complicated further by the fact that several books have been reprinted in various different publishing houses, and therefore obtaining a definitive number of sales is almost impossible. Yet, the sheer number of reprints not only suggests a lasting public interest in the topic, but also a distinct willingness among German society to accept the nobility's own interpretation of the vicissitudes of its history. It is striking that even a relatively sceptical journal like *Der Spiegel* offered a warm reception to Marion Countess Dönhoff's *Kindheit in Ostpreussen*. "Most impressive" the review stated "were the descriptions of the relatively austere lifestyle the family practised as well as how deeply this nobility felt obliged to care for its people."²¹⁹

Schoolbooks would appear to be one source that offer the prospect of measuring the impact of these narratives on the wider reception (and teaching) of German history. But here, too, the yield is disappointing, perhaps because the post-Marxist-Weberian paradigm informing the compilation of such texts militated against accentuating the experience of a

²¹⁸ By 1997 "Namen die keiner mehr nennt" had already reached 31 editions in the dtv. Five editions had been printed in the Rowohlt publishing house by 2009. Further editions appeared at Hugendubel, Siedler, K. G. Saur, Rautenberg and Diederichs. Among other publications, Ester von Schwerin's memoirs "Kormorane, Brombeerranken, Erinnerungen an Ostpreußen" achieved eight reprints at Langen Müller until 2009. Dohna's "Erinnerungen eines alten Ostpreußen" saw numerous editions in various different publishing houses such as Rautenberg, Orbis, btb and Siedler. Lehndorff's "East Prussian Diary" reached 33 editions in the dtv. Additional issues appeared at Biederstein, C. H. Beck and Madsack.

²¹⁹ Untergegangene Welt: Marion Gräfin Dönhoff – Kindheit in Ostpreußen, DER SPIEGEL, 19.12.1988.

particular elite social group. In this field, to a much greater extent than in the world of television or of publishing, the negative historiographical valence attached to the 'traditional elites' by the *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* of the 'critical school' shaped the narrative of Germany's road out of the moral catastrophe of Nazism.²²⁰

Part of the problem, of course, is that the story the nobles wish to tell was always one strand in a much larger narrative. The East-Elbian nobility were all expelled, to be sure, but the story of the expulsion was much bigger than the story of the East-Elbian nobility. The nobility is interwoven with it - as Andreas Kossert has powerfully demonstrated in his book *Damals in Ostpreußen: der Untergang einer deutschen Provinz* - and the expulsion is part of their public identity, but it is not a story about the nobility. Thus when schoolbooks touch upon the expulsion of the German people from East-Elbia

²²⁰ See here: Daniela Bender, Ludwig Bernlochner, Michael Epkenhans, et al., (eds), *Geschichte und Geschehen* 5/6, (Stuttgart, 2010); Hans-Jürgen Lendzian und Christoph Andreas Marx, (eds), *Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (Paderborn, 2001); Prof. Dr. Hilke Günther-Arndt, Dr. Dirk Hoffmann, Prof. Norbert Zwölfer, (eds), *Geschichtsbuch Oberstufe*, Vol. 2, (Berlin, 1996); Prof. Dr. Gerhard Brunn, Andreas Dilger, et. Al., (eds), *Kursbuch Geschichte – Berlin/Brandenburg*, (Berlin, 2001); Imanuel Geiss, Rolf Ballof, Renate Fricke-Finkelburg, (eds), *Epochen und Strukturen – Grundzüge einer Universalgeschichte für die Oberstufe*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1996); Frank Bahr, (ed.), *Horizonte II – Geschichte für die Oberstufe*, (Brunswick, 2007); Wolfgang W. Mickel, (ed.), *Geschichte Politik und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 1, (Frankfurt a. M., 1988); Berthold Wiegand, (ed.), *Geschichte Politik und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 2, (Berlin, 1993); Dieter Brückner, (ed.), *Das waren Zeiten*, Vol. 4, (Bamberg, 2005); Herbert Krieger, (ed.), *Die Welt seit 1945*, Vol. 1, (Frankfurt a. M., 1983).

- a topic that generally is not rewarded more than a few pages – the attention is not on the nobility but rather on society as a whole. Drawing conclusions from schoolbooks about the changing perception of the East-Elbian nobility therefore remains impossible.

We are thus left with the print runs, viewer statistics for a film and a few reader's letters. In the absence of opinion polls, a wider public debate or detailed reviews of the noble autobiographies allowing us to draw conclusions about perception, we are in the rather unsatisfactory situation of having to accept the output itself as key evidence of success. So we can never know with any precision the extent to which the positive mood music of noble propaganda facilitated the nobility's re-admittance into German boardrooms, legal practices or industrial companies, or helped them to re-ascend the peaks of West-German society and revive the charm and charisma of names like Hardenberg and Bülow. On the other hand, we can imagine a counterfactual scenario where none of this worked and where the nobility remained a despised and impoverished network, a group obsessed with their own past but rejected by everybody else - the greatest failures and losers of German history. Under such circumstances, it is hard to see how the process of public history management could have continued, why it would not have been abandoned. No reputable and successful publishing house would have wanted to publish such books and the nobility would have ended up being the only audience impressed and convinced by its own propaganda. That history did not take this path at least suggests that the nobles knew what they were doing when they invested such energy and inventiveness in polishing up their collective past.

The Cultivation of Memory

Introduction

In the spring of 2013, the author of this thesis was invited to the house of Carl-Friedrich Freiherr von B. He lives in a modest farmhouse half an hour outside of Münster, embedded in the rolling landscape of Westphalia. His family was expelled from its ancestral estate, Groß Mahnsfeld in East Prussia, during the final months of the Second World War.

The few large family portraits which could be saved in 1945 dominate the simple entrance hall. One of them shows von B.'s grandfather in the dress uniform of the 1st Foot Guard Regiment. At the end of the hall, a low door leads into a large and spacious living room, which is filled with all sorts of memorabilia. Here, Freiherr von B. has created something of a shrine to the history of the von B. family. Tea is served in a silver pot which his "grandmother rescued when the Russians were already in the house". On the various side tables sit elegant ammunition pouches from the Franco-Prussian war, numerous black and white photographs of the pre-war estate, precious tobacco tins from the time of Frederick the Great, statues, vases and exquisite Chinese ashtrays that a distant relative brought home from his grand tour in the eighteenth century. The entire room feels like an attempt to recreate Groß Mahnsfeld and preserve the memory of a lost world. Next to the window sits a bust of Carl-Friedrich's grandfather, made by the

renowned artist Wilhelm Schlüter. "My grandfather was a member of the DNVP. He could not stand Hitler. He always thought of him as a lousy and ill-mannered Austrian upstart who caused the downfall of Germany and the loss of the eastern provinces."

Freiherr von B. directs my attention to a large, beautifully bound book, prominently placed in the middle of the room, entitled *700 Jahre Familie von B.* "The newest edition of the family chronicle has just been completed. It was edited by my nephew, a history student from Göttingen, who spent years in the family archive to compile this volume for the seven hundredth anniversary of the family last year." The chronicle is filled with endless family trees, vignettes of distinguished family members, displays of landed wealth and accounts of expulsion and expropriation in the wake of the Second World War.

After tea, we take a walk through the adjacent fields along the forest, a landscape that poignantly reminds von B. of his *Heimat* in the East. Again and again, he drifts off into long monologues about the beauty of East Prussia and the cruelties his family had to experience and endure during their flight to the West. At the end of my visit, von B. hands me his personal memoirs. "This might be of interest for you. I wrote this so my children and grandchildren get a better understanding of where we come from and where we belong. I hope it might spark their historical awareness and the importance of close inter-family cooperation."

This vignette represents an isolated moment in a much larger enterprise that we might call the "cultivation of memory". It is astonishing how much

energy these noble families devote to privately archived cultural memory. All families do this to a degree. These are the poignant reminders of how time passes through the generations: old family pictures, lines on doors to show how children grow up, or family jewellery. But noble families are special in this regard, in the way that they preserve the family as a collective agent.

The expropriation and expulsion in 1945 put an end to the traditional manorial complexes in East Elbia and forced the large majority of the nobility to find makeshift accommodation in the west. Only a fortunate few were able to rely on residual assets in the west or family connections, which enabled them to sustain the lifestyle they had been accustomed to.¹ New and rather modest residences became depositories of family memorabilia. Apartments and detached houses were converted into shrines to family history, often almost resembling miniature museums. Every object that somehow survived the expulsion from East Elbia seemed to enter into a large collection of memorabilia, forming the basis of the commemoration of the old manorial world in the East.

These collections of memorabilia created a symbolic proximity for noble descendants to their forefathers. Family trees, royal certificates, family

¹ See the Henckel von Donnersmarck family, who owned a large property in Rottach-Egern, Bavaria, see the short description of Guidotto Karl Lazarus I Graf Henckel von Donnersmarck, in: Wolfgang Huber, *Kurt Huber vor dem Volksgerichtshof: zum zweiten Prozess gegen die weiße Rose* (Berlin, 2009), p. 130; also see the Dönhoff family who found refuge at the vast estate of the Hatzfelds at Crottorf in the Rhineland-Palatinate, in: Christian Graf von Krockow, *Portraits berühmter deutscher Frauen – Von Königin Luise bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2004), p. 392; Kilian Heck and Christian Thielemann (eds), *Friedrichstein – Das Schloss der Grafen von Dönhoff in Ostpreussen* (Berlin, 2006), pp. 93, 191.

portraits, richly decorated crests, historic sabres and family silver all belonged to a sophisticated noble remembrance system. Shotguns, once a gift of Tsar Nicholas II, portraits given to Count Dönhoff by Frederick the Great, family portraits and diaries, and a highly precious sabre bestowed by the Prince of Orange are all insignia of timeless noble grandeur. They rest upon the connection of past, present and future, and refer to a century old, complex system of noble remembrance techniques.²

The evocation of historical depth is a crucial strand of noble memory culture. The nobility is able to trace back their ancestors for centuries. Individual nobles regard themselves as a small “serving part in a chain of generations, one among many who has to pass on the legacy”, thereby forming a “community of the dead, living and unborn generations”.³ Within the noble self-perception, this connectedness seems to be aloof from any historic change.⁴ The name of the family was constantly kept alive through the name of villages, estates, regiments, coats of arms and extensive family trees.⁵ Noble memory therefore does not confine itself to a few generations; it extends across centuries.

² Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 287; Dönhoff, *Kindheit in Ostpreußen*, p. 16; Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 323; Deutsches Adelsarchiv (DAA), Familiengeschichte (FG) Bül, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülowsches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 371; also see: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 51, 52.

³ Lölhöff, *Ostpreußen*, p. 37.

⁴ See especially: Daniel Menning, *Adelige Familien und Konservatismus im 19ten Jahrhundert*, in: Eckart Conze, Wencke Meteling, Jörg Schuster, Jochen Strobel (eds), *Aristokratismus und Moderne – Adel als kulturelles und politisches Konzept* (Cologne, 2013), p. 174; Also see: Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein, *Adelsherrschaft und Adelskultur in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 1991), pp. 121–124.

⁵ Funck and Malinowski, *Masters of Memory*, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, pp. 86–98, here p. 86.

The memory cultivated in such contexts is not comprehensive. Not all 'remembered' events are accorded the same weight. The memory of past generations is always carefully pruned and selected. Most retrospective depictions reflect the presumption that the judgement of a family should be based on its most able rather than on its merely average members. Families such as the Bismarcks, Hardenbergs and Moltkes have perfected this technique over the centuries. The production of memorial booklets, sponsored biographical accounts, the naming of regiments and streets, grand festivities to commemorate the anniversaries of their achievements, as well as the erection of memorials are all examples of this technique. This ability to establish a perception of solely outstanding and exceptional personalities not only allowed the rest of the family to hide in the shadows of distinguished forebears, but also contributed to the willingness of the people to accept the families as a hereditary elite.⁶

The Evolution of the Family Chronicle

Among these commemorative techniques, an especially elevated position is often assigned to the family chronicle, since it ideally combines the three categories of noble memory culture. Prominently placed in the living room or the entrance hall, the chronicle is not only an important object to subtly point out the splendour and antiquity of the family, but simultaneously one

⁶ Monika Kubrova, *Vom guten Leben, Adelige Frauen im 19ten Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2011), p. 104; Funck and Malinowski, *Masters of Memory*, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, p. 86; Georg Simmel, *Exkurs über den Adel* (1908), in: Georg Simmel (ed.), *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1992), p. 824.

of the most important ways in which a family controls how it is remembered and what it is remembered for.

Undertaking a rigorous analysis of this kind of source is difficult. There is no central collection point. Many of these chronicles are published in very small print runs, generally not exceeding one hundred copies. Only the chronicles of the large family associations such as the Bülowes, Goltz or Arnims occasionally reach a few hundred copies.⁷ They are mainly circulated among family members. Archives and libraries occasionally purchase a few editions. Distinctly strong family bonds and a largely closed connubiality ensure the spread of these chronicles, not only within the core, but also, within the extended noble family.⁸ Copies are given to cousins, second cousins or even distantly related families in the region. Women who marry into other noble families add their family history to the already existing collections.

Compiling an exhaustive statistical analysis is not a practical undertaking. One would need to travel to the chief residences of virtually every East-Elbian family in order to track down these chronicles. This would exceed the time and resources available for this dissertation. However, with the help of Count Finckenstein and Dr Franke at the Adelsarchiv in Marburg, it was possible to study a selection of noble family chronicles. I have focused on a sample of thirty-five family histories published after 1945.

⁷ Personal interview with Manfred Dreiss, owner of the publishing house Degener & Co., 17.06.2015; Personal correspondence with Hans Albrecht Graf von der Goltz. There are 255 printed copies of the von der Goltz Family Chronicle.

⁸ For noble marital behaviour see: Conze, *Von Deutschem Adel*, pp. 329–340.

What is striking about these publications is that they are all extensions of previous editions; they all build on volumes that were first published during the second half of the nineteenth century. The post-1945 era was not the first in which the nobility had had to rally after a challenge to its pre-eminence. The increasing socio-political change of the nineteenth century saw many noble families fear for their leading position in society. The upheavals of 1848 had alarmed the nobility. These upheavals had been implicitly more anti-aristocratic than anti-monarchical. In fact, the convention at the Paulskirche had debated whether or not to abolish the nobility, not the monarchy.⁹ The industrial revolution and its insatiable need for cheap labour led to a steady rural exodus and increased demands for political participation among the workforce.¹⁰ As the population grew dramatically, so did the need for loyal civil servants.¹¹ In response to this need, the German sovereigns increasingly began to hand out noble titles and created a so-called 'meritocratic nobility'

⁹ Fritz Stern, Prussia, in: David Spring (ed.), *European landed elites in the nineteenth century* (Baltimore, 1977), p. 55; Josef Matzerath, *Adelsprobe an der Moderne – Sächsischer Adel 1763–1866 – Entkonkretisierung einer traditionellen Sozialformation* (Stuttgart, 2006), p. 101; Ulrike Ruttman, *Wunschbild, Schreckbild, Trugbild – Rezeption und Instrumentalisierung Frankreichs in der deutschen Revolution von 1848/9* (Stuttgart, 2001), p. 195.

¹⁰ See: Michel Hubert, *Deutschland im Wandel, Geschichte der deutschen Bevölkerung seit 1815* (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 155, 156; Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich, 1994), pp. 192–225; Florian Tennstedt, *Sozialgeschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1981), p. 135.

¹¹ The population of the Deutsche Bund grew by 54 percent from 1816 to 1864 (29.86 million to 45.92 million). In the same period, Prussia's population even grew by 86 percent (10.4 million to 19.3 million). See: Reinhard Rürup, *Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert 1815–1871* (Göttingen, 1992), p. 22.

(*Verdienstadel*). The old nobility not only feared an erosion of its political power, but also an infiltration of its meticulously shielded caste.¹²

The family chronicles must be read against the background of this gradual erosion of status and social exclusivity. The landed elites reacted to the threat of *déclassement* with a twofold strategy. On the one hand, they significantly intensified their infra-corporate cooperation. On the other hand, they began to meticulously document their family histories.¹³ The later nineteenth century witnessed a growing trend among the larger families such as the Bülowes, Arnims, Bredows, Puttkamers and Dewitzes to set up so called 'family associations'. Membership was strictly limited to legitimate bearers of the family name, limited to descendants of the male line and their wives, as well as their children born in wedlock.¹⁴ The family associations were funded by membership fees and managed by a committee, which was generally chaired by the head of the main family line.¹⁵ The main task of these committees was to foster the family's unity and reputation, preserve its monuments and heritage, support its financially weaker members and, most importantly, promote the family history.¹⁶ To achieve the latter objective, the

¹² See the treatise about the origins of the Massow Family Association, in: DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), *Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975* (1975), p. 29.

¹³ Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*, p. 345.

¹⁴ See for example the statute of the Oppen family association, online at: <http://www.vonoppen.org/>.

¹⁵ The von Bülow family, for example, charged a minimum of five Thaler. See: *Die Geschichte unseres Familienverbandes und der Wiederaufbau vor 50 Jahren*, Vortrag Henning von Bülow, Familientagssitzung 1998, online at: <http://familie.von-buelow.de/index.php5?Familie:Geschichte:Wiederaufbau>.

¹⁶ See for example the statutes of the von Bülow family association, online at: <http://familie.von-buelow.de/index.php5?Familienverband:Willkommen>; Similarly for the von Arnim family, online at: <http://www.vonarnim.com/start.html>; also see § 9 of the

families either commissioned a favourable historian or appointed a knowledgeable family member to compose a benevolent treatise of the centuries old family history.¹⁷

These chronicles use genealogy and idealised vignettes of exceptional family members to enhance and reinforce the family's self-identity. By embedding these isolated moments of family history in the larger narrative of popular history, a long, uninterrupted list of family achievements emerges. This creates an enormous pool of past splendour and inspiring anecdotes from which current and future generations can derive invaluable symbolic capital. Yet, additionally, these chronicles presented an ideal tool to wield the prerogative of interpretation and counter anti-nobility attacks launched in the context of public debates. The resource of the family chronicle acquired

statutes of the von der Marwitz family, in: DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht* (2014), p. 644.

¹⁷ At a family convention in 1908, Lieutenant-General Adolf von Bülow was assigned to compose a family chronicle. The first volume was published in 1911, the second in 1914, DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, I. Band, 1911; DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, II. Band, 1914; Commissioned by the Arnim family, Dr. Ernst Devrient composed *Das Geschlecht von Arnim* in 1923, DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim*, II Band, 1923; Henning von Koss, in cooperation with Juliane von Bredow, composed the von Bredow chronicle, DAA, FG Bre, von Bredow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Bredow – Herkunft und Entwicklung – 1251–1984*, 1984; The Hardenberg family commissioned Karl Heinrich Lang in 1793. They paid him 400 Thaler over two years, in: DAA, FG Har, von Hardenberg'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Hardenberg*, 1793. pp. 2–10; The Kleist family chronicle was published in 1887 and cost a staggering 5326 Mark. See: Von Kleist'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Kurze Nachrichten aus den letzten 50 Jahren der v. Kleist'schen Familiengeschichte 1858–1908* (Bergisch-Gladbach, 2007), p. 2.

heightened significance in the face of intensified popular *Adelskritik* and the emergence of *Neuadelskonzepte* at the turn of the century.¹⁸

It is hardly surprising that in 1945, the East-Elbian nobility, once again faced with a challenge to its social and political pre-eminence, reverted to pre-existing and well-established techniques to re-strengthen their shattered identity and regain control over their public image. The expulsion from East Elbia, a rupture of unique magnitude, once again gave rise to a reversion to the family, the core of noble identity. The widely dispersed families made use of their tight organisation and within a few years, the first family conventions were organized.¹⁹ As early as 1948, the Bülow's family council met at the Bossee estate to initiate the reunion of the family in the west. The same was true for the Klitzings, who reconvened at Alvesse near Braunschweig. The Wedels re-established their family association in the early 1950s and introduced annual conventions thereafter. The von der Marwitzes once again came together in 1952 in Hamburg, as well as the Bredows, who met in Mueden near Celle.²⁰

¹⁸ See especially Max Weber, *Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik. Akademische Antrittsrede* (Leipzig, 1895); Max Weber, *Die Verhältnisse der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1892); For *Neuadelskonzepte* see especially pp. 124-125 of this thesis as well as: Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899); Joseph Arthur Graf Gobineau, *Versuch über die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen* (Stuttgart, 1902); Alexandra Gerstner, *Neuer Adel – Aristokratische Elitekonzeptionen zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Nationalsozialismus* (Darmstadt, 2008), pp. 115–130.

¹⁹ As early as October 1945, Jürgen von Flotow and Hans Friedrich von Ehrenkrook set up the *Adelsblatt* as an attempt to channel the noble refugee lists and coordinate the re-conflation of noble families that had been dispersed by the war.

²⁰ "Die Geschichte unseres Familienverbandes und der Wiederaufbau vor 50 Jahren", Vortrag des Veters Henning v. Bülow, Aumühle, im Anschluß an die Familientagssitzung, online at: <http://familie.von-buelow.de/index.php5?Familie:Geschichte:Wiederaufbau;>

The continuation of the family history was a central theme of the family conventions after the war. The Third Reich had produced a caesura in noble family documentation. The war years had put a halt on such endeavours and the invasion and occupation of East Elbia by Russian Forces during the final phase of the war had not only led to the nobility's complete expulsion from its ancestral homes, but also resulted in the loss of vast archival collections, which often went up in flames.²¹ Thus, the first conventions after the war were used to promote the meticulous gathering of information to ensure an uninterrupted continuation of the family history. Every family member was encouraged to examine, collect and report all documents that were still in their possession and send copies to the family committee. Older relatives were urged to write down anything family related from memory and submit pictures from the lost estates in the East.²²

Various families went to work quickly. One of the earliest publications was the chronicle of the Eulenburg family in 1948. The Klitzings published their

Familienverband der Herren und Grafen von Wedel, Aus Wedel über Pommern nach Europa, Neugründung des Familienverbandes, online at: <http://www.vonwedel.com/index.php/geschichtliches>; The information concerning the Klitzings, Marwitz' and Bredows derive from personal correspondence between the author and the respective families.

²¹ Eulenburg-Hertefeld, *Ein Schloß in der Mark Brandenburg*, pp. 193, 194; Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 301–305; Personal correspondence with Hans Albrecht Graf v. d. Goltz, Dönhoff, *Namen die keiner mehr nennt*, p. 197; DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, pp. 252/53.

²² Auszug aus dem Protokoll des Familientages 1948, Personal correspondence with Jasper von Arnim; See also: 1. Nachrichtenblatt des v. Winterfeld(t)schen Familienverbandes nach dem 2 Weltkrieg, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Winterfeld(t)*, 2009, p. 364; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014 p. 646; DAA, FG Bon, von Bonin'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Pommersche Familie von Bonin*, 2008, p. 162.

first post-war genealogical tables in 1950, followed by a treatise in 1952. The Wedels followed suit in 1951. The Stülpnagels issued the first sequel to their extensive family chronicle in 1957. The 1950s saw further similar publications of the Arnims, the Kleists, the Zitzewitzes, the Massows, and the Goltzes.²³

Unfortunately, there is very little information available about the decision-making process behind these post-war chronicles. It would be of great value to glean more about this process; how the committees debated the structure of the chronicles, how they reached a consensus about the narrative, and how expensive it was to compile. This information is regrettably impossible to reconstruct because the noble families are very protective of the committee protocols and their balance books. Various families refused to give information about such enquiries. Others simply did not have detailed minutes of these conventions. The few accounts the author was able to obtain are very sparse and generally only identify the family members in attendance or the various items on the agenda.

²³ DAA, FG Eul, von Eulenburg'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Eulenburgs*, 1948; DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Stammtafeln*, 1950; DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Familie von Klitzing, ihre Schwiegertöchter und deren Ahnen*, 1952; DAA FG Wed, von Wedel'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Wedel in 8 Jahrhunderten*, 1951; DAA, FG Stü, von Stülpnagel'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Fortsetzung des Geschlechts von Stülpnagel*, 1957; DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Geschlechts von Arnim*, 1957; DAA, FG Kle, von Kleist'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Familie von Kleist*, 1957; DAA, FG Zit, von Zitzewitz'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Chronik des Geschlechtes von Zitzewitz – Geschichte der ersten und zweiten Linie des Geschlechts von Zitzewitz 1340–1958*, 1958; DAA, FG Mas, von Massow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Massows: Kleine Genealogie*, 1957; DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz'sche Familienverband (ed.), *Stammreihe der Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz*, 1956.

What does become apparent, however, is that the immediate post-war era hardly saw any commissioned chronicles. Mainly for financial reasons, the great majority of families assigned a historically experienced family member to serve as editor and oversee the production of the chronicle.²⁴ At the same time, the entire family was encouraged to write vignettes about their closest family members, as well as their experiences during and after the war, thereby turning these chronicles more into a composite work of numerous authors. The family association would initially cover the printing costs, and after the chronicle's completion, the various members were encouraged to acquire the chronicle at a discounted price.

National Socialism: a Footnote of Noble History

The majority of these chronicles built on the previous editions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The basic structure was generally carried over, as well as the majority of the older vignettes. But a survey of the post-1945 addenda reveals a preoccupation with the immense material losses in the East and a striking unwillingness to do justice to the entanglements between individual families and the Hitler regime. Such few references to National Socialism as occur betray a determination to downplay the

²⁴ See: DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, compiled by Jochen v. Arnim; DAA, FG Blü, Lebrecht von Blücher (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Blücher von 1914–2003*, 2003; DAA, FG War, Diedrich-Werner Graf von Hardenberg (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Wartensleben 1270–2000*, 2000; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014; DAA, FG Boe, von Boetticher'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Nachrichten über die Familie von Boetticher*, 2. Band, 1995 compiled by Dr. Hellmut v. Boetticher.

nobility's complicity in the criminality of the regime. In no case are the authors willing to face the implications of National Socialism, nor rethink their families' situation in the light of the difficult conditions of the Third Reich. They instead decide to simply add a few descriptive and highly apolitical chapters to cover the lives of the family members who experienced the Third Reich. At the same time countless reports about expropriation and expulsion emphasise the suffering of the families and substantiate their self-perception as victims rather than perpetrators.

The focus is mainly on male members of the family. Women are portrayed throughout the chronicles, but predominantly in their role as wives.²⁵ The vignettes differ in length and detail. A few notable family members, generally the owners of the large estates, are honoured with lengthy vignettes. These detailed descriptions give a close insight into the typical living conditions of an East-Elbian squire. We read about a traditional upbringing in the Wilhelmine era, lavish dinner parties with 120 guests, extravagant shooting days, and all sorts of activities the protagonists prevail

²⁵ See the lengthy vignette of Dietloff von Arnim and his wife Alexandra, in: DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 429–430; Vignette of Antonie von Bülow, in: DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 372; Vignette of Else Gräfin von Bernstorff, in: DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 268; Vignette of Hedwig von Jagow, in: DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, p. 71; Vignette of Margarethe von der Marwitz, in: DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 412; Vignette of Margarethe von Massow, in: DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), *Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975*, 1975, pp. 176, 177.

in.²⁶ There are plenty of references to the participation in the Great War, the economic difficulties of the 1920s, and the deeply inherent piety of these noblemen.²⁷ All of the protagonists of these chronicles held numerous honorary posts, passionately cared for their workers and actively promoted the respective communities. They built hospitals and retirement homes, and renovated local churches.²⁸ The enormous socio-political upheavals of the Third Reich, however, are studiously avoided. It is striking how sparse and skeletal references to National Socialism or Hitler are. If we come across any such references, they are exclusively embedded into resistant anecdotes designed to portray an inherently distant, if not even oppositional, attitude of the protagonist. In these cases, we read of Joachim Carl von Maltzahn's "tense relationship to the Gauleitung", Dietloff von Arnim's membership in

²⁶ For a typical noble upbringing in boarding schools, cadett schools and Corps Saxonia in Göttingen see: Traugott von Jagow (1865-1941), in: DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, p. 155; For a depiction of a grand party see the account of the 50 year wedding anniversary of Georg and Marie von Klitzing, in: DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing'sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 5. Teil, 1993, pp. 179–185; For a description of a shooting day see the vignette of Hermann von Bernstorff (1867-1946), in: DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 265.

²⁷ For achievements during the Great War see especially the vignettes of Fritz and Otto von Below, in: DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), *von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum*, 1974, pp. 577–578; For a typical foreclosure in the 1920s see the description of the estate Karwe, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Winterfeld(t)*, 6. Teil, 7. Band, 2009, pp. 32–33.

²⁸ See especially the vignette of Joachim Dietlof Graf von Arnim, in: DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 433–440; Walter von Below, in: DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), *von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum*, 1974, p. 441; DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 295; For the construction of numerous workers homes see: DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), *Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975*, 1975, p. 111.

the Deutschnationale Volkspartei and his “invariable distance to Adolf Hitler”, Joachim von Arnim’s resignation from the SA, or Werner von Bernstorff’s dismissal from the civil service due to “political unreliability”.²⁹

This supposedly oppositional mind-set is further underlined by the recurring theme that the individual in question “fled” into the army to avoid an impending obligation to join the NSDAP or one of its sub-organisations. Throughout the Third Reich, the Wehrmacht remained, at least on paper, apolitical, and thus being a soldier/officer precluded membership in any political party, including the NSDAP. Various family chronicles make strategic use of this apologetic argument. There is, for example, Hans-Klaus von Goldbeck, who, after years in the private sector, decided to take up a position in the civil service to escape the economic difficulties of the early 1930s. “Based on his qualifications and experience – he had been a lieutenant during the First World War – the Wehrmacht seemed to be the natural choice. Furthermore, he thereby avoided having eventually to join the NSDAP of which he disapproved.”³⁰ Analogously, Viggo von Blücher is portrayed as being repulsed by the Roehm coup in 1934, and subsequently joining the Wehrmacht to escape the clutches of the NS-regime.³¹ The same is

²⁹ DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 323; DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 431, 437; DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 272.

³⁰ DAA, FG Gol, Hans-Georg von Goldbeck (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Goldbeck*, 2002, p. 78.

³¹ DAA, FG Blü, Lebrecht von Blücher (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Blücher von 1914–2003*, 2003, p. 129.

true for Jaspar von Maltzahn, who allegedly avoided membership in the SA by joining the Wehrmacht as a reserve officer, recalling the Wehrmacht as somewhat of “a natural reserve, providing shelter from the encroachments of the party”.³²

The plausibility of this argument is questionable. It goes without saying that in certain professions and situations it certainly proved beneficial to join the NSDAP. Membership, however, was only very rarely compulsory. Quite the contrary, following the Nazis’ ascension to power in early 1933, the NSDAP effectively put a halt on new memberships in April of that year, since numbers had skyrocketed from roughly 850,000 in January to around 2.5 million in April.³³ The gradual abolition of this restriction in 1937 and 1939 once again did lead to an increase to 5.3 million in 1939 and 8.5 million in 1945. This meant that even in 1945, at the absolute peak, only every fifth adult was a member of the NSDAP.³⁴ Thus speaking of a compulsion to join the NSDAP is highly debatable. Such coercion might have been true for certain sections of the civil service, especially during the later stages of the Third Reich, but most certainly not during the formative years. It is more likely that the widespread argument of having “fled” into the army is a retrospective attempt to imply an alleged early reluctance towards the regime by using one’s involvement in the Wehrmacht as a pretence to suggest an anti-NS attitude.

³² DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 317.

³³ Nolzen, *Die NSDAP vor und nach 1933*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 47 (2008), p. 23.

³⁴ Schildt (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert: Ein Lexikon*, p. 259.

Reading these vignettes, one almost gets the impression that the era of the Third Reich was dominated by social tranquillity, political stability and significant tedium. We hardly find any reference – let alone any self-critical reference – to crucial events such as Hitler's seizure of power, the Nuremberg Laws, the anti-Jewish pogroms, the Anschluss of Austria or the crimes committed in the East. Unlike the highly detailed vignettes of the pre-war period, these treatises are also not linked to the larger picture of popular history. In other words, the isolated moments of individual family history are not embedded into corollary history of the Third Reich, thereby preventing the reader from being able to understand the historical framework of the time. As consequence, these vignettes mostly remain aloof from the criminality of the regime. To an outsider, it thus seems as if the East-Elbian estates and its squires lived in an apolitical bubble during most of the Third Reich.

The large majority of the post-war vignettes, however, are rather brief, sometimes almost bullet point-like abstracts. One is first struck by how skeletal the information provided is. These treatises generally resemble short curricula vitae and therefore often remain highly descriptive. Mostly, the material confines itself to key biographical data, such as date of birth, year of graduation, initial occupation and a few lines about interests and character traits of the protagonists. Predominantly, we encounter men who were educated at knight academies (*Ritterakademien*) or cadet schools. Many of

them became civil servants, officers or agrarians, and shared a passion for horses and hunting.³⁵

Yet, once again, these vignettes do not contain any direct references to a possible involvement in the machinations of the Nazi regime. There are no indications of SA, SS or NSDAP memberships.³⁶ Any information about political attitudes, allegiances or ideology is kept under tight wraps. This is even more remarkable given the fact that Stephan Malinowski has recently proven that noble families, especially the large East-Elbian noble families, provided dozens of party members. There were 34 Alvenslebens in the NSDAP, 53 Arnims, 34 Bismarcks, 40 Bülowes, 33 Klitzings, 36 Maltzahns, 70 Ostens, 41 Schulenburgs and 78 Wedels.³⁷

What is interesting, however, is that almost every vignette to a certain degree accounts for the protagonist's military involvement in the Second World War. This procedure powerfully reveals the nobility's crucial dilemma in

³⁵ See exemplary the vignette of Helmuth Wilhelm von Hardenberg (1842-1915). Hardenberg went to boarding school. Thereafter, aged 17, he joined the Prussian Dragonerregiment No. 2. Finished his career as Major-General, DAA, FG Har, Diedrich-Werner Graf von Hardenberg (ed.), *Die Hardenbergs – Lebensläufe, Stammtafeln und Urkunden 1139–2005*, 2005p. 49; For a typical career in the civil service see the vignette of Andreas von Bernstorff (1844-1907), who, after his law exams, joined the Foreign Office, in: DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, pp. 339–344; For another military career see Friedrich Heinrich August Freiherr von Bülow, who died as an active officer in WWI, in: DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 350; For the career of an agrarian see: Hans Detlev von Arnim, in: DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 616/617.

³⁶ The only exception is the von Wietersheim Chronicle, which at least provides limited information about NSDAP membership. See: DAA, FG Wie, von Wietersheim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Wietersheim*, 2. Band, 2006.

³⁷ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, footnote 422, p. 574.

dealing with its role during the Third Reich. On the one hand, the noble families are keen to emphasise their undying loyalty to the Reich. On the other hand, the authors of the chronicles are determined to downplay the nobility's complicity in the criminality of the Nazi regime. As a result, the large majority of these vignettes feature numerous, yet highly skeletal, references to military careers.

The chronicles meticulously and prominently list all casualties of the Second World War. These sections feature endless pictures, which even today show the protagonists in Wehrmacht uniforms – as if the family did not have any other kind – and thereby remind the reader of the family's cumulative sacrifice.³⁸ Short descriptions tell us of extraordinary fighter pilots, highly decorated commanders and fearless attacks deep into enemy territory. We come across paratroopers who decisively fend off Soviet breakthrough attempts, young flying aces who prevail in dozens of aerial battles, and commanders who die in the lead of their battalion. We see hearts, filled with ardent love for the fatherland, stop beating, and outstanding young pilots fail to return from the front over England.³⁹ Almost every family can list

³⁸ See exemplary: DAA, FG Stü, von Stülpnagel'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts von Stülpnagel*, 2009, pp. 65–68; DAA, FG Wie, von Wietersheim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Wietersheim*, 2. Band, 2006, pp. 34, 53, 56, 69, 80, 86, 91, 103; DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, pp. 238, 276, 286, 314, 332, 426.

³⁹ DAA, FG Sch, Dietrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (ed.), *von der Schulenburg – Geschichte von 1237–1983*, 1984, p. 366; DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, pp. 317–320; DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, pp. 373, 363–365.

numerous casualties from the defence of the fatherland.⁴⁰ These portrayals clearly display how the nobility intended to preserve an untainted self-perception. Ever since the foundation of the Kingdom of Prussia in 1701, the East-Elbian nobility had regarded itself as the hereditary defender of king and country. For centuries, it had sent its younger sons to the army and accepted enormous casualties in Prussia's frequent wars. Despite the abolition of the monarchy in 1918 and the introduction of a republican army, this self-perception had not changed. The Second World War once again demanded a "horrible death toll"; 8,284 noblemen died in battle or remained missing.⁴¹ (Considering the fact that the nobility accounts for roughly 0.1 per cent of the population, this is an exceptionally high share.)

Although the individual vignettes tend to be less heroic, they also tell us very little about what actually happened during the war. Predominantly, these records are kept very brief and only give basic information about rank, branch of service and sometimes theatre of operations. All we learn about

⁴⁰ These numbers include military as well as civilian casualties: 11 Belows, in: DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum, 1974, pp. 578–583; 11 Bernuths, in: DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth'scher Familienverband (ed.) Das Bernuth Buch, 1986, pp. 439–442; 33 Maltza(h)ns, in: DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie, 1979, pp. 317–320, pp. 320–322; 13 Lüttwitz, in: DAA, FG Lüt, von Lüttwitz'scher Familienverband (ed.), Geschichte des schlesischen Geschlechtes von Lüttwitz 1185–2000, 2001, pp. 13–14; 15 Massows, in: DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975, 1975, p. 16; 20 Schulenburgs, in: DAA, FG Sch, Dietrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (ed.), von der Schulenburg – Geschichte von 1237–1983, 1984, pp. 19–26; 9 Goltz, DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz'sche Familienverband (ed.), Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960, 1960, pp. 30–35; 20 Groeben, DAA, FG Gro, Friedhelm Dölling und Wolfgang von der Groeben (eds), Die Geschichte der Familie von der Groeben – Eine Wort- und Bilddokumentation. Von der Mark Brandenburg bis nach Ostpreußen, 2009, pp. 349–357.

⁴¹ Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Volume 4, p. 750. See also Görlitz, *Die Junker*, pp. 405–410.

Ernst Georg von Bernuth, for instance, is that he was drafted when he was still at school and died at the age of twenty as lieutenant in 1945.⁴² Ludwig von Bernstorff served as major in the Luftwaffe;⁴³ Ernst von Bülow fought throughout the entire war and ended up in American captivity;⁴⁴ Heinz Fedor von Wietersheim became a pilot in the Luftwaffe, whereas his father commanded a Flakregiment and was posted to France and Russia before a sniper shot him during the suppression of the Warsaw uprising.⁴⁵ Bernhard von Bernuth's vignette is equally less revealing, and only tells us that he re-joined the army in 1934 and ended the war as Lieutenant Colonel.⁴⁶ The actual information we are able to derive from these abstracts is always a bare minimum. None of these cases feature any kind of specifics about what actually happened at the front and what these men experienced. There are no references to the cruelties of the war or the inhuman policies of the Wehrmacht. There is no effort to reflect on the crimes committed in the East or the brutality of German warfare. Above all, there is none of the kind of context that would allow these experiences to be put into perspective.

By implication, this lack of information makes it very hard to assess to which degree these men have actually been entangled in the criminality of the

⁴² DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth'scher Familienverband (ed.) *Das Bernuth Buch*, 1986, pp. 21, 441.

⁴³ DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 296.

⁴⁴ DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 366.

⁴⁵ DAA, FG Wie, von Wietersheim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Wietersheim*, 2. Band, 2006, pp. 69, 70 and pp. 25–27.

⁴⁶ DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth'scher Familienverband (ed.) *Das Bernuth Buch*, 1986, pp. 281–285.

regime. Investigating all these cases would go far beyond the scope of this thesis. There are, however, a number examples that suggest that the complicity of many of these men in the crimes committed in the East was much deeper than these chronicles generally allow for.

At the end of the 1930s, Hermann von Bülow was promoted to provisional officer responsible (*Reichsbeauftragter*) at the Reichs Office for Petroleum. Between 1940 and 1945, he served as senior department head of petroleum in the Wirtschaftsstab Ost and the Four Year Plan Office.⁴⁷ At first glance, this information does not seem especially problematic. What the chronicle studiously overlooks, however, is the fact that the Wirtschaftsstab Ost had solely been designed for the “radical exploitation of the occupied territories” in the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ In due course, the Wirtschaftsstab Ost was also in charge of the recruitment and transportation of forced labour, and therefore indirectly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Soviet slave labourers.⁴⁹

A wartime career of Fritz-Otto von Bernuth’s is bowdlerised in a similar manner. “During the Second World War, Fritz-Otto served for several years as commander of the large prisoner camp in Hammerstein. Due to great personal aptitude and commitment he saved innumerable Soviet prisoners of

⁴⁷ DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülowsches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 357.

⁴⁸ Bundesarchiv Freiburg, RW 31 (Wirtschaftsstab Ost, mit Geschäftsbereich 1940–1945) / Einleitung.

⁴⁹ Bundesarchiv Freiburg, RW 31 (Wirtschaftsstab Ost, mit Geschäftsbereich 1940–1945) / Einleitung; also see: Rolf-Dieter Müller, Raub, Vernichtung, Kolonisierung. Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten 1941–1944, in: Hans Schafranek und Robert Streibel (eds.), *22. Juni 1941. Der Überfall auf die Sowjetunion* (Vienna, 1991), pp. 99–111.

war from starvation.”⁵⁰ The fact, however, that the Soviet inmates had to sleep in burrows dug in the ground because the barracks had no heating, floors or windows, finds as little mention as the typhus epidemic, which alone killed between forty and fifty thousand Soviet POWs.⁵¹ An official report of the US Military Intelligence Service in 1945 regarding the conditions at Hammerstein stated, “treatment was worse at Stalag II-B (Hammerstein) than at any other camp in Germany. [...] Harshness at the base Stalag degenerated into brutality and outright murder”.⁵² Although the report did not raise any specific allegations against the camp’s commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel von Bernuth, himself it did note, “it is unlikely that the extreme severity of his underlings could have existed without his knowledge and consent”.⁵³

The vignette of Alfred von Wietersheim also prompts several questions. He apparently served in the headquarters of the 6th Army as accompanying officer to Field Marshal von Reichenau, the very man who shortly after the start of operation Barbarossa had issued the notorious severity order. Therein he stated that “the most important objective of this campaign against the Jewish-Bolshevik system is the complete destruction of its sources of power and the extermination of the Asiatic influence in European

⁵⁰ DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth’scher Familienverband (ed.) *Das Bernuth Buch*, 1986, p. 343.

⁵¹ Christian Streit, *Die Behandlung der sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen und völkerrechtliche Probleme des Krieges gegen die Sowjetunion*, in: Gerd R. Ueberschär und Wolfram Wette (eds), *Unternehmen Barbarossa. Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion* (Frankfurt a. M., 1991), p. 169.

⁵² Richard Lucas, *Axis Sally: The American Voice of Nazi Germany* (Havertown, 2010), p. 92.

⁵³ “American Prisoners of War in Germany”, Prepared by Military Intelligence Service, War Department, 1 November 1945, National Archives at College Park, Series: Subject Files, 1942-1946, Record Group 389: Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1920-1975.

civilisation. In this eastern theatre, the soldier is not only a man fighting in accordance with the rules of the art of war, but also the ruthless standard bearer of a national conception".⁵⁴ Even though there is no file in the Berlin Document Centre which gives specific evidence of von Wietersheim's complicity in any war crimes committed in the East, the fact that he was the closest aide of one of Hitler's most notorious paladins suggests a much deeper involvement in the criminality of the regime than the Wietersheim chronicle implies.

Further samples also reveal the nobility's reluctance to disclose their involvement in the agencies of the Third Reich. Carl-Eduard Brandt von Lindau was the heir to a large estate in Schmerwitz. He travelled extensively, owned a large racing stable, was a passionate hunter and skilled bobsleigh rider in St. Moritz. His daughter described him as "a kind, generous and all-understanding" squire who had no enemies.⁵⁵ The fact that he joined the NSDAP around 1930 and soon after became *Ortsgruppenführer* in Wiesenburg, where he also promoted the SA and built up a *Reitersturm*, is deliberately ignored.⁵⁶ The chronicle gives us no hint at all at his complicity in the Nazi regime.

We come across a similar case in the Bülow chronicle. Hans von Bülow mentions his cousin, Ulrich von Gienanth, who had joined him at one of the remaining family estates in Holstein after the expulsion from the East. After

⁵⁴ William Craig, *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for Stalingrad* (Old Saybrook, 1973), pp. 10, 11.

⁵⁵ DAA, FG Bra, Friedrich Graf von Pfeil und Klein-Ellguth (ed.), *Die Nachkommen der Herren Brandt von Lindau aus der Schmerwitzer Linie*, 2014, p. 200.

⁵⁶ John Shreve, Reetz. *Ein Dorf in der Brandtsheide 1861–1961* (Reetz, 1998), pp. 112–116.

his return from Sweden, von Gienanth had apparently spent some time in British captivity. Thereafter he found work on a neighbouring estate.⁵⁷ Nothing in this description remotely indicates that we are actually dealing with a former *SS-Hauptsturmführer*. In fact, since 1937, Ulrich von Gienanth had been the propaganda attaché at the German embassy in Washington, simultaneously serving as the head of the Gestapo in the United States. During the war, he transferred to the Swedish embassy from where he returned to Germany in 1945.⁵⁸

Hans-Joachim von Wietersheim's description does not imply any sort of involvement in the organisations of the Third Reich. The chronicle only tells us about his professional career, which saw him working for a German-Russian oil company before he joined the finance department of the IG-Farben in 1939.⁵⁹ The fact that he had served as the personal assistant to Karl Ernst, the notorious head of the SA in Berlin, between 1932 and 1935 as SA *Sturmbannführer* finds no mention.⁶⁰

Overall, information about the nobility's involvement in the Third Reich is strikingly sketchy and skeletal. One almost gets the impression that National Socialism had merely been a footnote of German history. This impression is

⁵⁷ DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülowsches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 466.

⁵⁸ Personalakte Ulrich von Gienanth in: Pol. Archiv AA, G Stockholm 409, cited in: Daniel B. Roth, *Hitlers Brückenkopf in Schweden – Die deutsche Gesandtschaft in Schweden* (Berlin, 2009), p. 214.

⁵⁹ DAA, FG Wie, von Wietersheim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Wietersheim*, 2. Band, 2006, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Nationalrat der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland Dokumentationszentrum der Staatlichen Archivverwaltung der DDR (eds.), *Braunbuch: Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik und in Westberlin* (Berlin, 1968), p. 408.

especially formed by the countless vacuous references to military careers, as well as the evident omission of NS-careers, revealing an enormous determination to trivialise the nobility's complicity in the criminality of the regime. The sporadic references to National Socialism that do surface indirectly reinforce this impression. As Harald Welzer has suggested in his study regarding trans-generational remembrance, NS-related accounts generally centre on sacrifice, justification and distancing from the regime.

Thus, when the Brackel chronicle bemoans the bitter fate of Harald von Brackel – whom was prohibited from continuing his stamp business after the war due to an early NSDAP membership that his brother in law had apparently talked him into – this cannot be considered an example of dealing with the NS-past, but rather an attempt to victimise the protagonist.⁶¹ The same is true for the vignette of Hans von Wietersheim, who had been dismissed from the civil service due to his NSDAP membership, and was therefore forced to work as a tour guide of a travelling theatre, factory worker and 'small' employee of the British Military government, by turns.⁶² "Such a depiction ultimately generates compassion and empathy. Who himself had been a victim of the system, so appears to be the subtext of such victim-constructions, is defended against the suspicion of having been an offender or even a profiteer."⁶³ The Maltzahn chronicle goes even further by extending this approach to the entire family. "If members of the younger

⁶¹ DAA, FG Bra, Peter von Brackel (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Brackel*, 2004, p. 687.

⁶² DAA, FG Wie, von Wietersheim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte der Familie von Wietersheim*, 2. Band, 2006, p. 71.

⁶³ Harald Welzer, *Opa war kein Nazi. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt a. M. 2003), p. 82.

generations joined the NSDAP it often was not a sign of allegiance to Hitler but rather an attempt to avoid trouble.”⁶⁴ Ultimately, all these hints of information join the ranks of a carefully constructed concept of strategic and apologetic remembrance to downplay the nobility’s entanglement in the Third Reich and shift the focus from complicity to victimhood.

Selective Remembrance

In sharp contrast to the sparse and skeletal references to the Third Reich, which suggest a strategic suppression of the Nazi era, we come across an enormous depth of detail when it comes to noble suffering during the expulsion from East Elbia in 1945. Whereas the nobility went to great length to curtain and conceal their complicity in the crimes committed in Germany’s name, they eagerly attempted to highlight and document their role as victims of the Red Army and the post-war settlement.

The chronicles are interspersed with lengthy and particularised descriptions of all sorts of unimaginable horrors. The deeply rooted fear of the Red Army drove dozens of noblemen and -women to commit suicide. “War, desperation and fear about the uncertain future had demoralized our relatives to a degree that on 18 April 1945 our beloved grandmother Helen von der Marwitz, her daughter Anna Ilse, her son in law Wilhelm von

⁶⁴ DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 318.

Lyncker and their children took their own lives.”⁶⁵ Alexandra von der Marwitz described a similar scenario at Nossin. “Shortly after the Russians had arrived, the manor house was set aflame. Everything burned down and the fire smouldered for days. The hardship of the villagers was indescribable; some families collectively committed suicide.”⁶⁶

Wherever the Soviets arrived, they left a trail of devastation. “Upholstery and family paintings were slashed, furniture burnt and destroyed, the silverware stolen and the manor house looted.”⁶⁷ The alley leading up to one of the Maltzahn estates was entirely chopped down, the driveway ruined, the stables and barns demolished and the surrounding farms collectivised.⁶⁸ When the squire had not left in time, the Soviets generally showed no mercy. “On 2 May 1945 a Russian commando arrived at the manor house and grabbed Gerhard von Maltzahn. His wife saw how he was dragged into a car. Ever since, Gerhard has been missing.”⁶⁹ Friedrich von Arnim suffered a similar fate. When the Russians arrived at his castle, Arnim and his male relatives were driven into one of the barns. “Shots were fired, the commissar came out. [...] My father was dead, head shot!”⁷⁰

The majority tried to escape the advancing Red Army. The German population was so deeply suffused with fear of Soviet revenge that “all of

⁶⁵ DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), 800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht, 2014, p. 509.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 526.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 509.

⁶⁸ DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n’scher Familienverband (ed.), Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie, 1979, p. 359.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 360.

⁷⁰ DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing’scher Familienverband (ed.), Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing’sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 5. Teil, 1993, p. 529.

Prussia was on the move; in horse-drawn carts, on bicycle or on foot.”⁷¹ “It was twenty-five degrees below zero in an icy easterly wind. With lightning speed we packed everything and vacated the estate. Hell had broken loose at the train station.”⁷² Yet, the families who had managed to leave in time often were not spared either. “Babies froze to death on the open horse-drawn carts and had to be abandoned by their mothers in the snow.”⁷³ Gisela von Massow left her ancestral estate in February 1945, only for her “trek to be overrun and pillaged by the pursuing Russians”.⁷⁴ Elisabeth von Jagow “fell victim to Soviet fighter planes, which mercilessly attacked the treks.”⁷⁵ Such attacks happened everywhere along the trek routes. “Just short of Swinemünde, an air raid dispersed the treks and caused thousands of victims.”⁷⁶ “The Russians caught up with the trek from Exin and caused havoc among the refugees. The men were mostly shot in roadside ditches. Women and children were also executed. The wife and children of Pastor Dinkelmann from Zinsdorf fell victim to randomly fired machine guns.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ DAA, FG Eul, Christoph L’Estocq (ed.), *Fünf Eulenburgs aus dem Hause Wicken im alten Ostpreußen*, 2. Fortsetzung, 1988, p. 170.

⁷² DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing’sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 5. Teil, 1993, p. 527.

⁷³ DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 509.

⁷⁴ DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), *Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975*, 1975, p. 195.

⁷⁵ DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, p. 109.

⁷⁶ DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 528.

⁷⁷ Und die Räder sangen auf dem Schnee... (22/23 Januar 1945) Treckbericht, in: DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow’sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 446.

The situation was especially painful for women. Without their husbands and fathers, who were mostly dead or on the front, they were defencelessly exposed to Russian vengeance. Cautious estimates assume that at least 860,000 German women were raped by Allied soldiers and occupation forces.⁷⁸ The majority of these cases occurred during the Soviet advance into East Elbia. Overall, the topic was collectively suppressed in German post-war society due to the moral stigma attached to the crime. Yet several noble chronicles addressed the issue between the lines. Members of the Arnim family were incarcerated in the basement of the manor house and “the girls, aged between twenty-two and twenty-five were exposed to ‘special terror’. When their aunt wanted to protect them she was almost beaten to death with a revolver”.⁷⁹

Three daughters of the von Bernuth family “had to experience how their father was deported and their mother was wounded so badly by a head shot that she died a few days later. Over the following weeks and months, the three sisters, aged between twenty-one and twenty-five, experienced inconceivable misery and degradation. All Germans, especially women, were regarded as fair game”.⁸⁰ The Klitzing Chronicle tells us that although one of their estates had already been thoroughly looted by various detachments of the Red Army, Russian soldiers kept returning again and again to look for German women, “sometimes up to nine times a day. All doors remained

⁷⁸ Miriam Gebhardt, *Als die Soldaten kamen. Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 2015), p. 8.

⁷⁹ DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing'sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 5. Teil, 1993, p. 529.

⁸⁰ DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth'scher Familienverband (ed.) *Das Bernuth Buch*, 1986, p. 74.

unlocked. We listened in awe to the screaming and shouting of the girls on the lower floor. They were searching for 'Paninkas' – girls – for everything they could pick up".⁸¹

Overall, the exceptional depth of detail displayed in these accounts of noble suffering reveals how selectively noble chronicles shaped the remembrance of the recent past. Wherever noble families could be portrayed as victims of the avenging Allied armies, the bestiality of the Nazi regime or the injustices of foreign occupation, noble memory appears to be sharp, vivid and verbose. Yet, as soon as the focus is laid on their role as perpetrators, the nobility's distinct passion for meticulously documenting their family history becomes rather monosyllabic.

This approach, however, was nothing particularly unusual. West German society as a whole passed through a long and complex process after 1945 that has sometimes been called 'coming to terms with the past'.⁸² Soon fed up with denazification, German society largely turned against a reprocessing of their Nazi-past and vigorously demanded to draw a line under the ambitious re-education efforts of the Allies.⁸³ "The large mass of the population [...]

⁸¹ DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing'sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 5. Teil, 1993, p. 574.

⁸² See: Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001); Richard Matthias Müller, *Norma-Null und die Zukunft der deutschen Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Scherfeld, 1994); Klaus Sühl (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung 1945 und 1989. Ein unmöglicher Vergleich?* (Berlin, 1994); Armin Mohler, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Krefeld, 1980); Eckhard Jesse und Konrad Löw (eds), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Berlin, 1997); Meinhard Adler, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 1990); Gary Schaal und Andreas Wöll (eds.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Modelle der politischen und sozialen Integration in der bundesdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1997).

⁸³ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 14.

could understand neither its intent nor its purpose.”⁸⁴ Thus, public sentiment was firmly supportive of a ‘forgive and forgot’ policy.⁸⁵ The mass amnesties granted by the German parliament between 1949 and 1954 famously accounted for this public desire.⁸⁶

The government also actively promoted the widely held view that the German population had been the victim of Hitler as much as of the Soviets. The meticulously researched and state sponsored *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost- und Mitteleuropa* painstakingly portrayed German suffering during and after the war.⁸⁷ Thousands of eyewitness reports, personal letters and official documents were gathered to support the victimisation of the German population. In the documentation, virtually all Germans were portrayed as innocent.⁸⁸ They were used to divert the focus from German culpability and relativise German atrocities during the Nazi era.

⁸⁴ OMGWB Monthly Historical Report For October 1945 vom 15.11.1945; NA, RG 260, 3/410-2/7; OMGSK Stuttgart, Monthly Narrative Historical Report vom 15.12.1945; NA, RG 260, 5/10-1/12, cited in: Michael Fichter, Betriebsräte, in: Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke und Hans Woller (eds), *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform – Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (Munich, 1988), p. 509, 510.

⁸⁵ Public attitudes toward denazification, ICD Report, No. 55 vom 15.4.1947, in: Barbara Fait, Die Kreisleiter der NSDAP – nach 1945, in: Broszat, Henke und Woller (eds), *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform*, p. 233; the report also stated that “a solid majority (62%) were opposed both to noting former NSDAP membership in Pg’s identification cards and keeping them from going back to their former jobs”.

⁸⁶ Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Schieder und das Bundesministerium für Vertriebene (eds.), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost- und Mitteleuropa*.

⁸⁸ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories – The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Los Angeles, 2003), p. 74.

The story of German forgetting – whether pathological, therapeutic or politically expedient – has had an extraordinary longevity.⁸⁹ As late as 1987, Hermann Luebbe labelled this process “the ‘socio-psychologically necessary medium’ of a successful transformation of former NS-Volksgenossen into citizens of the Federal Republic”.⁹⁰ Yet, only recently has a closer, more critical look at the early history of the FRG revealed that “in the 1950s, West Germans were neither disabled by their inability to mourn [...] nor intentionally silent about National Socialism in order to get on with post war reconstruction and democratic re-education”.⁹¹ Numerous accounts of recent ‘desirable’ German history were published in the 1950s.⁹² Even several war films were shown in cinemas which highly praised the Wehrmacht’s unique camaraderie.⁹³ The nobility’s one-sided remembrance policy thus coincided with a larger trend among German society; a trend, which showed that dealing with Germany’s recent past was not so much about forgetting, but rather about remembering selectively.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁹⁰ Hermann Luebbe, Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Gegenwart, in: Martin Broszat, Ulrich Dübber, Walther Hofer (eds.), *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur* (Bonn, 1983) p. 334.

⁹¹ Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 16.

⁹² See: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte (eds), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost- und Mitteleuropa* (Bonn, 1953–1961; Walther Hubatsch, *Die deutsche Besetzung von Dänemark und Norwegen* (Göttingen, 1952); Eberhard Orthbandt, *Deutsche Geschichte: Lebenslauf des deutschen Volkes, Werdegang des Deutschen Reiches* (Laupheim, 1954); Hubertus Prinz zu Löwenstein, *Deutsche Geschichte: Der Weg des Reiches in zwei Jahrtausenden* (Frankfurt a. M., 1951); Peter Rassow (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte im Überblick* (Stuttgart, 1953).

⁹³ Axel Schildt, Kultur im Wiederaufbau, Tendenzen des westdeutschen Kulturbetriebs, in: *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, 256 (Reprint 2012), p. 48.

Delegitimising the Post-War Settlement in the East

In addition to the highly detailed accounts of flight and expulsion, the noble chronicles also reveal a salient preoccupation with property. The treatises meticulously document the families' landed interest and highly glorify the pre-war estate culture. At the same time, they give ample space to demonstrate the rapid deterioration of culture after the war. Consequently, this preoccupation is not only an expression of the nobility's deep connectedness to its ancestral land, but also a strategic attempt to delegitimise the political post-war settlement in the East.

The immediate aftermath of the Second World War saw the complete expropriation of the East-Elbian nobility. The former German provinces east of the Oder-Neiße shared this fate with the rest of the German population. The redrawing of Poland at the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945 had led to a mass displacement of the remaining German populations in the East.⁹⁴ In the Soviet Occupation Zone, however, which covered the remaining parts of traditional East Elbia, the nobility faced a unique situation. Unlike any other social group, it was collectively held responsible for the crimes of the Hitler regime and the suppression of the rural population. The Soviets made no distinction between 'good' and 'bad' members of the nobility. Even those who remained politically uncontaminated or uncompromised faced the loss of their estates.

⁹⁴ See: G. C. Paikert, *The German Exodus. A selective study on the post-World War II expulsion of German populations and its effects* (The Hague, 1962), pp. 6–20; See also: A. de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam. The Expulsion of the Germans from the East* (Lincoln, 1989); Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*.

On 11 June 1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party (KPD) issued a proclamation which demanded “the liquidation of the large landownership, the large estates of the Junkers, counts and princes and transfer of all their land as well as their livestock and equipment to the [...] peasants”.⁹⁵ The intention was the complete “destruction of the economic basis of Prussian Junkerdom”, hence a kind of cataclysmic assault on the traditional power structure of the nobility.⁹⁶ In the autumn of 1945, all but a handful of noble estates had been expropriated, and the vast majority of families had been deported to Western Germany.⁹⁷ By the end of the year, noble life in East Elbia had ceased to exist.

Complete expropriation was not only a material, but also a traumatic psychological, shock for the nobility. The basic prerequisite for the nobility’s self-assertion in the modern world had been the preservation of its landed wealth, the safeguarding of its connection to the land, and thereby its ancient supremacy among rural society.⁹⁸ Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin was convinced that “the roots of the nobility’s power were anchored and will

⁹⁵ “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands”, *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 11 June 1945, cited in: Paffrath, *Macht und Eigentum*, p. 54.

⁹⁶ Peter Erler, Horst Laude und Manfred Wilke (eds), *Nach Hitler kommen wir – Dokumente zur Programmatik der Moskauer KPD-Führung 1944/45 für Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Berlin, 1994), p. 311.

⁹⁷ Every estate exceeding 100 hectares was expropriated in autumn 1945. The vast majority of noble estates fell into this category. Some families tried to circumvent this policy by splitting up their estates. Those, however, fell victim to the subsequent expropriation waves of the late 1940s and early 1950s. See: DAA, FG Stü, von Stülpnagel’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts von Stülpnagel*, 2009, pp. 55–65; Jonathan Osmond, *Geschlechterspezifische Folgen der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone: Gutsbesitzerinnen, Bäuerinnen und Landarbeiterinnen nach 1945*, in: Arnd Bauerkämper (ed.), *Junkerland in Bauernhand?* (Stuttgart, 1996), p. 151.

⁹⁸ Heinz Reif, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1999), p. 9.

always be anchored in large landed estates” and Franz von Papen labelled the estates “the bedrock of our status, our claim for leadership”.⁹⁹ The large estates provided financial independence to hold high office and offered the local context for a befitting lifestyle. It was here that central aspects of the noble cultural model – hunting and equestrianism – were exclusively pursued.¹⁰⁰

Most importantly, however, the estates invariably served as a refuge point for the entire family. The larger houses traditionally provided shelter for unmarried aunts, far-travelled uncles, orphaned cousins, or family friends.¹⁰¹ They truly proved to be the connecting piece between generations, ensuring continuity; a concept which was of unique importance to the identity of the nobility. The nobility’s understanding of its own uniqueness is largely based on “a special historic dimension; from the earliest known generations to the currently living ones, up to the ones born in the future, one feels connected within the nobility. Within the noble self-perception this connectedness appears to be immune to all historic change.”¹⁰²

This trans-generational consciousness largely finds its expression in the nobleman’s relationship with the ancestral estate. The hall decked family portraits, “where the living individual recognizes himself as a working link

⁹⁹ Friedrich Keinemann, *Vom Krummstab zur Republik – Westfälischer Adel unter preußischer Herrschaft 1802–1945* (Bochum, 1997), p. 391; Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, *Adel und Preußentum*, in: *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 23, (1925/26), p. 379.

¹⁰⁰ For the importance of hunting and horses see: Theilemann, *Adel im grünen Rock*, pp. 53–202; also see: Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, pp. 64–68.

¹⁰¹ Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*, pp. 148–164.

¹⁰² Menning, *Adelige Familien und Konservatismus im 19ten Jahrhundert*, in: Conze, Meteling, Schuster, Strobel, *Aristokratismus und Moderne*, p. 174.

in a long chain of generations, as one among many who has to pass on the heritage”, creates a link between the past and the present.¹⁰³ The same image is conveyed when Ottfried Finckenstein feels the “breath of history” wafting around the six hundred year old walls of his ancestral castle in East-Prussia; when the Maltzahn family chronicle mourns the loss of Vanselow, an estate which had been in the family for almost six hundred years; when family pilgrimages return to the East to lay down wreaths on the ruined graves of their ancestors, or donate generously for the restoration of ancient tomb stones.¹⁰⁴ The alleys planted by the great-grand father, the location where one shot their first dear, or the family tomb underneath the oak trees at the end of the park – all signify the interconnectedness between land and trans-generational continuity.¹⁰⁵

Thus, it is not surprising that the chronicles assign ample space to the portrayal of the estates. Most of the editions feature lengthy sections detailing all the estates that at some point in time were in family possession. The Bismarck chronicle lists – over 112 pages – almost two hundred estates. The Belows record 221 estates, divided between the two branches of the family, dating back as far as 1300. The extensive table of the Hake chronicle mentions 173 estates, of which only two appear to have remained in family possession by the first half of the twentieth century. The Stechows list 104, the Goltz’ 274, and the Eickstedts 239. The Schulenburgs even establish

¹⁰³ Lölhöffel, *Ostpreussen*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁴ Finckenstein, *Nur die Störche sind geblieben*, p. 10; DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 334; DAA, FG Wed, von Wedel’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Wedel – Eine kleine Familiengeschichte*, 2003, p. 150; Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 325.

¹⁰⁵ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*, p. 63.

various subcategories, including their exact losses through expropriation in 1945, amounting in total to more than 41,000 hectares.¹⁰⁶

On the one hand, such detailed documentation was certainly intended to maintain claims over this land in case there might be a reversal of political fortune. One might compare this to the extensive record of family trees. As much as they were utilised to display the antiquity and splendour of the family, they were also always a tool to assert claims over inheritances or territories.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, such thorough documentation shows the significance of these estates to the nobility's self-identity. Such endless catalogues create an uninterrupted list of landed wealth, relating the estates to the "extreme *longue durée*, sheltered from all accidents, crises and sudden breaks".¹⁰⁸

Additionally, every chronicle offers lengthy descriptions of the large family estates. We learn about their historic origin. Many of them, such as Neu-Hardenberg or Groß Kreisau, were royal donations. The Finckenstein estate at Schönberg dated back to the Teutonic knights. Others were bought with

¹⁰⁶ DAA, FG Bis, von Bismarck'scher Familienverband (ed.), 700 Jahre altmärkisch – uradeliges Geschlecht von Bismarck, 1971, pp. 287–389; DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum, 1974, pp. 576–584; DAA, FG Hak, Dietloff von Hake (ed.), Geschichte der brandenburgischen Familie von Hake, 1928, pp. 521–523; DAA, FG Ste, von Stechow'scher Familienverband (ed.), Die Herren von Stechow, 1979, pp. 35–38; DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz'sche Familienverband (ed.), Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960, 1960, pp. 11–27; DAA, FG Eic, von Eickstedt'scher Familienverband (ed.), Familienbuch der von Eickstedt, 3. Band, 1993, pp. 26–60; DAA, FG Sch, Dietrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (ed.), von der Schulenburg – Geschichte von 1237–1983, 1984, p. 305.

¹⁰⁷ Monika Wienfort, in: Adel verpflichtet: Ist der Adel noch elitär?, *ARD*, 27.10.2012.

¹⁰⁸ Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago, 1980), p. 45.

earnings from public office or acquired through strategic marriage.¹⁰⁹ There are plenty of anecdotes about the dangers they faced during Russia's incursion during the Seven Years War, the Napoleonic occupation in the early nineteenth century or the Russian advance into East Prussia in 1914.¹¹⁰ There is ample material about agricultural development, architectural change, and the nobility's fervour for hunting or a royal visit.¹¹¹ All in all, these accounts provide a detailed insight into traditional noble life in the countryside.

Most importantly, however, these accounts betray an extraordinary unwillingness to accept the post-war political settlement in the East.

¹⁰⁹ DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Winterfeld(t)*, 2009, p. 340; DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 43; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 374; DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, p. 210; DAA, FG War, Diedrich-Werner Graf von Hardenberg (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Wartensleben 1270–2000*, 2000, p. 50.

¹¹⁰ DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing'sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 5. Teil, 1993, p. 39; DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 215; DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), *von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum*, 1974, p. 199; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 259; DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Winterfeld(t)*, 2009, p. 66.

¹¹¹ DAA, FG War, Diedrich-Werner Graf von Hardenberg (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Wartensleben 1270–2000*, 2000, p. 50; DAA, FG Ber, Werner Graf von Bernstorff (ed.), *Die Herren und Grafen von Bernstorff – Eine Familiengeschichte*, 1999, p. 257; DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 267; DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, p. 427; DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, p. 211; DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow'sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 274.

Throughout the vignettes, the authors are anxious to enhance and glorify the pre-war noble patrimonial system and present it as the humane alternative to post-war Soviet collectivism. The pre-war estates are turned into havens of social welfare and justice, political tranquillity and economic productivity, whereas the post-war descriptions are cluttered with accounts of economic decline, structural decay and political despotism.

Accordingly, we see Friedrich von Maltzahn riding 45 kilometres on horseback to inspect his fields, listen to the concerns of his workers and visit the sick.¹¹² In celebration of his 75th birthday, Walter von Below granted considerable donations to especially loyal workers and threw them a banquet.¹¹³ Antonie von Bülow fulfils the idealistic role of a patron's wife by loyally nursing the sick workers of the estate. "Even in the worst weather, day or night, she never shrank from visiting the sick since doctors and nurses lived far away."¹¹⁴ His lordship's children play with the son of the coachman, and on Christmas, the gardener receives a box of cigars.¹¹⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm von der Goltz gives his attention to the construction of workers' dwellings and sponsors a modern local hospital.¹¹⁶ Dietlof von Arnim and his wife Alexandra are further examples of indulgent and solicitous patriarchs. Like

¹¹² DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, p. 275.

¹¹³ DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), *von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum*, 1974, p. 442.

¹¹⁴ DAA, FG Bü, von Bülow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülowsches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 372.

¹¹⁵ DAA, FG Bra, Friedrich Graf von Pfeil und Klein-Ellguth (ed.), *Die Nachkommen der Herren Brandt von Lindau aus der Schmerwitzer Linie*, 2014, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz'sche Familienverband (ed.), *Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960*, 1960, p. 164, p. 172.

their forefathers, they felt obliged to provide for their people and therefore renewed and rebuilt their houses, cared for the sick, built kindergartens and provided for the elderly.¹¹⁷

These accounts draw the image of an idealistic manorial complex in which everybody worked towards the greater good of the community. This concept closely followed Heinrich Wilhelm Riehl's theory of the *Ganze Haus*, which described the ideal family as a combination of "an economic, consumption and living community". The *Ganze Haus* presupposes the subservience of everybody to the lord of the manor (*pater familias*) in return for material provision and physical protection.¹¹⁸ Various generations are depicted living together and helping one another. The workers may have been bound to their lord but, in return, they were cared for when they were sick or old.¹¹⁹ Noble chronicles had nurtured this ideal-type of a traditional family ever since the turn of the century. So effective was the propagation of this model in noble publications, that by 1900, the concept of the 'traditional family' was strongly associated with the nobility – a state of affairs that endowed the family chronicles with even greater propagandistic importance.¹²⁰ The post-war chronicles heavily draw from this decade old strategy and powerfully

¹¹⁷ DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 429–430.

¹¹⁸ Wolf-Dieter Scholz, *Familie auf neuen Wegen? Familiensoziologische Veränderungen und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Erziehung. Vom 'ganzen Haus' zur bürgerlichen Klein- bzw. Kernfamilie: Wandlungen in den Familienformen* (Münster, 2005), p. 1.

¹¹⁹ See: Otto Brunner, *Das "ganze Haus" und die alteuropäische "Ökonomik"*, in: F. Oetter (ed.), *Familie und Gesellschaft* (Mohr, 1966), pp. 23–56.

¹²⁰ Menning, *Adelige Familien und Konservatismus im 19ten Jahrhundert*, in: Conze, Meteling, Schuster, Strobel (eds), *Aristokratismus und Moderne*, pp. 177–180.

utilised it to expose the contrast between pre-war social harmony and post-war discord and horror.

At the same time, these countless anecdotes of welfare and solidarity turn these estates into escape capsules from history. The idea of the *Ganze Haus* offers a refuge from the vicissitudes of politics, implying continuity that is ultimately apolitical or at least politically neutral. Just like the individual vignettes of family members, the descriptions of the estates entirely ignore National Socialism. Instead the estates are construed as an idyllic refuge where the nobility can weather out the crises of war, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Thereby the estates are wrested from the contamination of the Third Reich and stand the test of time in noble commemoration of East Elbia.

What these family histories tend to omit, however, is the fact that these estates or manorial districts, as Otto Braun, the social democratic Prime Minister of Prussia during the Weimar Republic, remarked, formed “the attribute of the supremacy of a privileged caste typical for the old Prussia”.¹²¹ Albert Grzesinski, the interior minister at the time, similarly saw the estates as the most concise expression of power distribution from which the nobility, after 1918, continued to derive their strength, since these districts continued to remain “small, absolute lordships”.¹²² And by contrast with their depiction in the chronicles, the estates indeed served as centres of political activism in the rural areas of East Elbia. Famously, they served as the breeding ground

¹²¹ Otto Braun, *Von Weimar zu Hitler* (Zürich, 1940), p. 239.

¹²² Grzesinski, *Im Kampf um die deutsche Republik*, p. 198.

for the reactionary counter revolutionary movement during the formative years of the Weimar Republic, when the large estates eagerly served as training grounds for paramilitary formations and hideouts for weapons and ammunition.¹²³ Leading landowners, such as Count von Eulenburg-Prassen, Count von Eulenburg-Wicken and Count von Dohna-Tolksdorf, helped to organize the Heimatbund Ostpreussen to protect the province against internal insurrection, as well as against possible external threats posed by Poland and Soviet Russia.¹²⁴ Furthermore, they served as connecting points between the old and new elites during the rise of National Socialism, when squires like Konrad Count Finckenstein or Hermann Count Dohna welcomed prominent Nazis, such as Erich Koch, Hermann Goering and even Adolf Hitler, into their country homes.¹²⁵

In addition to depicting the estates as apolitical islands, the authors of the family histories celebrated the management and cultivation of their forebears who appear as model-agrarians who, over many centuries, had established “flourishing landscapes” in the East. Implicit in this mode of representation was an attempt to delegitimise the post-war settlement by drawing attention to rural stagnation and neglect in post-1945 East Elbia.

The chronicles convey the impression that the majority of East-Elbian landowners were highly successful agrarians, conscientiously managing their land and people. Noble properties are elevated almost without

¹²³ Dohna, *Erinnerungen*, p. 165; Schildt, *Der Putsch der Prätorianer*, in: Reif (ed.), *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland II*, pp. 103 -125.

¹²⁴ Görlitz, *Die Junker*, p. 351.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 374.

exception to “model estates [in] excellent economic and structural condition”. We make the acquaintance of “outstanding agrarian[s] and stockbreeders” who despite “immensely difficult conditions and heavy soil”, significantly reduce the debts of their forefathers, set up horse breeding programmes, revive their forestry and renovate their partially superb edifices.¹²⁶ The various agricultural crises of the last decades, which led to a massive reduction of the nobility’s landed wealth, are frequently addressed between the lines. These crises appear as dim signals from distant times, often serving as the stepping-stone for later generations of model agrarians, who took over and saved the indebted and low-yielding estates to turn them into modern and flourishing agricultural businesses.¹²⁷

The fact that around one third of the landed wealth had to be sold off or foreclosed during the protracted crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, is often overlooked.¹²⁸ Striking also is the disregard of the Eastern Aid program. This government policy was introduced in 1929-30 to provide financial relief for bankrupt estates in East Elbia. Large scale debt

¹²⁶ DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz’sche Familienverband (ed.), *Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960*, 1960, pp. 144–146 and 164; DAA, FG Sch, Dietrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (ed.), *von der Schulenburg – Geschichte von 1237–1983*, 1984, p. 392; DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow’sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, pp. 380–382.

¹²⁷ See, for example, the detailed description of Joachim Dietlof Graf von Arnim’s achievements at Boitzenburg in the 1930s, DAA, FG Arn, von Arnim’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Chronik der Familie im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, IV Band, 2002, pp. 432–439; see also: DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz’sche Familienverband (ed.), *Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960*, 1960, pp. 144–146 and 164; DAA, FG Bül, von Bülow’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Bülow’sches Familienbuch*, III. Band, 1994, p. 382; DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), *Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975*, 1975, p. 45; DAA, FG Ber, von Bernuth’scher Familienverband (ed.) *Das Bernuth Buch*, 1986, pp. 39–41.

¹²⁸ Reif, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 98.

restructuring and reduction of interest payments significantly eased the financial pressure on the large East-Elbian estates. Until 31 March 1933, the Eastern Aid authorised 16,358 debt relief loans accounting for 196,327,350 Reichsmark. Of these, 1,039 loans with a volume of staggering 99,773,210 Reichsmark were granted to estates measuring more than 100 ha.¹²⁹ Based on the relation between deleveraged agricultural enterprises and the allocated funds, a strong preference for the large estates is hard to deny. A significant majority of these large estates were still in noble hands, wherefore the Eastern Aid program became in actuality a clandestine government subsidiary policy for the East-Elbian nobility.¹³⁰ In December 1932 and January 1933, the suspicion was raised that the Eastern Aid program had been massively abused to fill the pockets of large landowners.¹³¹ The ensuing scandal, which threatened to implicate hundreds of the oldest Junker families who had waxed fat on unredeemed government loans, was eventually silenced by the new Nazi government in the summer of 1933.¹³² Yet none of these events find expression in the family chronicles. Instead, the chronicles paint the picture of exemplary and conscientious model agrarians, who weather the economic and social storms, repair the damage of previous generations and guide the estates and their people into a calm and steady

¹²⁹ Daniela Münkel, *Nationalsozialistische Agrarpolitik und Bauernalltag* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996), pp. 281–282.

¹³⁰ Alfred Kantorowicz, *Ost und West: Beiträge zu kulturellen und politischen Fragen der Zeit 1947–1949* (Königstein, 1979), p. 24.

¹³¹ See especially the remarks of Joseph Ersing, secretary of the Christian unions, in the Reichstag: “If the state subsidies are not being used for the repayment of debts but for the acquisition of luxury cars, race horses and journeys to the Riviera, the state has to ask for this capital to be returned.” Printed in: Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, p. 542.

¹³² Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. 180.

future. Large-scale government interventions to help the nobility back on its feet did not fit into this carefully constructed image of economic excellence.

One has to read these idealising and glorifying accounts as appeals against economic mismanagement and social injustice in the Communist East. All these subtle suggestions of past success, splendour and achievements are designed to present a positive alternative to the post-war settlement. The chronicles elevate the pre-war noble estate culture to a socially just and economically unrivalled system. Therein, the rural population is provided for, the agricultural economy is thriving and the nobility maintains and protects the achievements of German culture in Eastern Europe.

This alternative is vividly supported in the family histories by extensive photographic evidence documenting the immaculate structural condition of the estates and the flourishing landscapes of the pre-war era. The chronicles are littered with images of magnificent manor houses, servants in immaculate liveries, hardworking peasants on fertile fields, and beautifully kept parks.¹³³ To increase the contrast to the communist era, these idyllic depictions are generally set against dark and grim post-war pictures of decay and deterioration. Overgrown parks, vandalised graveyards and dilapidated manor houses dominate these illustrations. To emphasise the overt decline,

¹³³ See exemplary the chronicles of: DAA, FG Bon, von Bonin'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Pommersche Familie von Bonin*, 2008, pp. 167–169; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, pp. 437–438, 494, 501, 505; DAA, FG Mal, von Maltza(h)n'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Maltza(h)n 1194–1945 – Der Lebensweg einer ostdeutschen Adelsfamilie*, 1979, pp. 331, 358, 362, 370, 379; DAA, FG Sch, Dietrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (ed.), *von der Schulenburg – Geschichte von 1237–1983*, 1984, pp. 337, 361, 371, 390, 391, 404, 443, 449; DAA, FG Jag, von Jagow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechtes von Jagow 1243–1993*, 1993, pp. 144, 177, 199, 206, 212, 218.

many of the pre-war photographs have been exactly recreated.¹³⁴ Thus we see, for example, the Dewitz family celebrating a family day after the fall of the Wall in a terribly decayed drawing room of one of their former manor houses. Adjacent to this image, we find original pictures of the resplendent drawing room from the end of the nineteenth century, powerfully representing the magnitude of deterioration.¹³⁵ Often these comparative images are annotated to further accentuate the depletion of the estates and inculcate the post-war system. The Groeben chronicle bemoans that one of their “beautiful manor house had been turned into a rundown block of flats”.¹³⁶ The magnificent views from the Below estate at Seehof are “entirely overgrown” and “the heads of the family crest guarding the main portico have been knocked out”. At Pustamin, “the roof is wrecked and the ceilings and walls are tumbling down. The entire house is left to ruin”. When the Belows still owned these houses, the chronicle boasts, “those domains were

¹³⁴ See exemplary: DAA, FG Dew, von Dewitz’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Neugier auf Vergangenheit – Die Geschichte der Familie von Dewitz in Bildern*, 2013, pp. 62–64, 113–115, 127; DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Winterfeld(t)*, 2009, pp. 344 and 347; DAA, FG Mar, Helga Helene von der Marwitz (ed.), *800 Jahre von der Marwitz – Ein märkisches Familiengeschlecht*, 2014, p. 370; DAA, FG War, Diedrich-Werner Graf von Hardenberg (ed.), *Das Geschlecht von Wartensleben 1270–2000*, 2000, pp. 56, 57; DAA, FG Har, Hardenberg, Diedrich-Werner Graf von (ed.), *Die Hardenbergs – Lebensläufe, Stammtafeln und Urkunden 1139–2005*, 2005, pp. 146, 147; DAA, FG Gro, Friedhelm Dölling und Wolfgang von der Groeben (eds.), *Die Geschichte der Familie von der Groeben – Eine Wort- und Bilddokumentation. Von der Mark Brandenburg bis nach Ostpreußen*, 2009, pp. 97, 188, 189.

¹³⁵ DAA, FG Dew, von Dewitz’scher Familienverband (ed.), *Neugier auf Vergangenheit – Die Geschichte der Familie von Dewitz in Bildern*, 2013, p. 66.

¹³⁶ DAA, FG Gro, Friedhelm Dölling und Wolfgang von der Groeben (eds.), *Die Geschichte der Familie von der Groeben – Eine Wort- und Bilddokumentation. Von der Mark Brandenburg bis nach Ostpreußen*, 2009, p. 302.

model estates".¹³⁷ At Brauchitschdorf, a former estate of the Klitzing family, "the roof has come down and horror sprouts out of the windows. [...] The fine old rooms with its magnificent stucco have been repainted with green and dark yellow oil paint. It is a horrible scene".¹³⁸

Thus these chronicles paint a colossal glorification of a perished world. The nobility attempts to monopolise certain values and images to construct a highly transfigured past. Most of these images revolve around the former estates and the nobility's connection to its ancestral lands. The chronicles strategically adopt the concept of the *Ganze Haus* to portray the nobility as the benevolent guardians of the rural population. They forge the impression of apolitical squires whose vast landed interest not only guaranteed continuity for the family, but for society as a whole. They paint the image of moral integrity, social welfare and economic excellence. All this is sharply juxtaposed with post-war decay and deterioration. Thereby the chronicles create a fictional elite of successful and altruistic squires, without whom East Elbia is doomed and left to ruins. The underlying conclusion to be drawn is that East-Elbian nobility, even decades after the war, had not accepted the expropriation of their estates in the East. In their eyes, they "had lost everything through no fault of their own".¹³⁹ They had fallen victim not only to Hitler and National Socialism, but also to the horrors of war and the ensuing barbaric implications of Soviet collectivism.

¹³⁷ DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum, 1974, pp. 582–584.

¹³⁸ DAA, FG Kli, von Klitzing'scher Familienverband (ed.), Menschen und Schicksale – von Klitzing'sche Häuser im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 5. Teil, 1993, pp. 441–443.

¹³⁹ DAA, FG Mas, Kurt von Massow (ed.), Die Massows: 100 Jahre Familienverband 1875–1975, 1975, p. 46

Conclusion

The expulsion in 1945 transformed East Elbia's ancient landed nobility into a displaced community. The loss of its material and social pre-eminence triggered a return to infra-corporate cooperation and assistance. Strategic efforts to reunite family members and revive traditional noble networks promptly after the war were the first attempts in a long process of replenishing noble habitus, re-strengthening self-identity and reshaping the image of this bewildered caste.¹⁴⁰ The most important aspect of this reconstruction process was to re-obtain the prerogative of interpretation of collective memory. To do so, the nobility could draw on centuries of experience of controlling, shaping and utilising their own history. As "masters of memory",¹⁴¹ they put traditional techniques of remembrance back into service in order to process the traumata of expulsion and decontaminate the past, and as consequence, establish a desirable perception in the present.

A few intertwining conceptual images form the basis of this noble post-war memorial strategy. The chronicles consistently try to convey an image of continuity. The families are presented as one long, uninterrupted chain of notable family members, bound together by service to their people and

¹⁴⁰ As early as October 1945, Jürgen von Flotow and Hans Friedrich von Ehrenkrook had published the so called "Refugee List I". Its main purpose was the reuniting of dispersed families from East Elbia. Online at: <http://www.sachsenadel.de/6-0-publikationen.html>; Shortly after the war, Wolf von Wrangel also put together a list of all dispersed East Prussian noble families, including new addresses in the West. See: DAA, FG Eul, von Eulenburg'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Eulenburgs*, 1948, p. 322.

¹⁴¹ The term derives from an article published by Stephan Malinowski and Markus Funck, *Masters of Memory*, in: Confino and Fritzsche (eds), *The Work Of Memory*, pp. 86–98.

fatherland. The excessive display of enormous landed wealth buttressed with endless anecdotes of patrimonial welfare and diligence paint the image of an autochthonous elite, solely driven by the desire to maintain the heritage of the family. The constantly resurfacing attempt to transfigure the estates into alleged islands of apolitical continuity are designed to detract the highly glorified manorial life from the vicissitudes of politics, and henceforth, allow the accounts from this period to enter untarnished into a carefully constructed remembrance system. The simultaneous presentation of the alleged economic soundness of the estate economy further supports the image of a highly successful, but also benevolent, elite. Combined, such an image was designed to subtly attack, and thus delegitimise, the German post-war settlement of expropriation and redistribution of land. This narrative was used to reassure the nobility of its self-perceived pre-eminence, as well as the injustice which had been brought upon them, and thereby, became a potent infra-corporate connecting point.

Similarly, such extensive commemorative work proved to be a powerful tool in the strategic attempt to decontaminate the recent past and distance the East-Elbian nobility from the crimes of the National Socialist regime. The multitudinous anecdotes of bravery, moral integrity and heroism paint the picture of a loyal military caste, willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the nation. The constant subtle references to alleged widespread resistive tendencies among the nobility reveal the authors' attempts to cement a position for their families on the right side of history. The enhancement and emphasis of the nobility's participation in the military resistance is subliminally employed to depict the nobility as a caste who

exclusively realised the Nazis' criminal nature and acted accordingly. Lastly, the infinite accounts of noble suffering during and after the war help to transform an image of complicity into one of victimhood and as a consequence, divert the narrative focus from guilt to suffering.

Yet, one should not forget that many of these addressed anecdotes might by and large be true, and represent the actual convictions of the many people in question. What is so interesting and revealing about these accounts, however, is the context in which they are presented. The complete suppression of any self-critical stories, and the widespread denial of National Socialism in general, render these anecdotes seemingly universal for the social class as a whole. As Maurice Halbwachs has suggested, such anecdotes are responsible for setting the framework of family remembrance. The constant repetition of certain values and behaviour patterns ultimately creates family specific characteristics which have to be kept intact.¹⁴² Hereby, the chronicles strategically allow for the transformation of individual stories of the past into a "common attitude of a group" from which, in this case, the entire family, and subsequently the nobility as a whole, can benefit.¹⁴³

For roughly three decades after the war, the family chronicles proved to be a decisive tool in the nobility's struggle to decontaminate the past and regain the prerogative of interpretation. Increasingly thawing relations with Poland, and the subsequent widespread acceptance of the definitive loss of traditional East Elbia, however, led to gradual textual and stylistic change

¹⁴² Maurice Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen* (Frankfurt a. M., 1985), p. 209.

¹⁴³ Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis*, p. 209.

within the chronicles. As can also be witnessed in the autobiographies written in this period, a younger generation, generally not having held higher offices during the war, began to shift the focus from glorification, justification and apologetics towards a more neutral and less embellishing form of commemoration. Firstly, this generation had been much less actively involved in the Third Reich than their predecessors, and therefore, did not feel the same desire to explain, justify or exculpate their behaviour. Secondly, by the 1970s, the worst of the post-war crisis had been overcome and the nobility had succeeded in re-establishing itself in West German society. As in the past, periods of crisis, such as in the late 19th century or especially after the First World War, which saw a sharp increase in written family history, were followed by periods of less literary activity, simply because there was less of an imperative for self-defence.

The more recent editions of the chronicles thus confine themselves to short and simplistic additions to the previous volumes. Ubiquitous glorification of the protagonists hardly occurs. The newer vignettes tend to be rather neutral in tone and style and thereby significantly differ from their early post-war counterparts. The early accounts are dispersed with declamatory vocabulary and Nazi-terminology, while terms such as “red hordes”, who “flood the borders of the Reich” to destroy 600 years of German pioneering work, “Anglo-American terror air-raids” or “landmarks of German proficiency and vigour” do not feature in the newer editions.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ DAA, FG Bel, Oskar Pusch (ed.), von Below: Ein deutsches Geschlecht aus dem Ostseeraum, 1974, p. 579; DAA, FG Eic, von Eickstedt'scher Familienverband (ed.), Familienbuch der von Eickstedt, 3. Band, 1993, p. 274; DAA, FG Gol, von der Goltz'sche

What is even more striking about the more recent volumes, however, is that they remain reprints of the previous editions, featuring additions only of present generations. They are 'continued' by means of updating supplements, in the manner of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chronicles of European royal houses.¹⁴⁵ Hardly any critical revision of previous accounts occurs. Cultivating rather than scrutinising memory remains the first priority today, as in the decades after 1945.

Familienverband (ed.), *Die Grafen und Freiherren von der Goltz 1885–1960*, 1960, p. 14; DAA, FG Ste, von Stechow'scher Familienverband (ed.), *Die Herren von Stechow*, 1979, p. 175.

¹⁴⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Le Temps de l'histoire* (Paris, 1986), pp. 135–138.

Return to East Elbia

Introduction

On 9 November 1989 at 7:02 p.m., a wire report from Reuters emerged, stating that Günter Schabowski, a member of the Politburo of the GDR, had just declared in a press conference that “leaving via all GDR checkpoints is immediately possible”. A more detailed statement followed soon after. “East German citizens wishing to leave can, starting immediately, use all border crossings [...] those who want to leave no longer need to take a detour via Czechoslovakia. The responsible police offices are instructed to issue visas for emigration immediately.”¹

Despite *perestroika* and *glasnost*, intensifying economic problems, and the mass demonstrations of the East German people throughout the preceding months, hardly anybody had deemed the GDR at risk, let alone predicted the sudden and total collapse of the workers’ and peasants’ state. As late as September 1989, the BND² concluded that the population of the GDR lacked a “broad popular consensus to protest” against the ruling elite, and neither the state, nor the social system were in immediate danger of being overthrown.³ The mass exodus of GDR citizens to Czechoslovakia in early

¹ Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse – The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York, 2014), p. 127; See also: Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan (eds), *Das Ende der SED: Die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 54–57.

² Bundesnachrichtendienst, West German Secret Service.

³ Bodo Hechelhammer (ed.), *25 Jahre Mauerfall. Dokumente aus den Akten des BND-Archivs, Mitteilungen der Forschungs- und Arbeitsgruppe “Geschichte des BND”* (Berlin, 2014), p. 51.

autumn of 1989 instilled in many a feeling of hope for a less repressive future, but nobody dared to imagine the complete collapse of Eastern Germany. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a political and social transformation of historical dimensions, ultimately resulting in the reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990.

The momentous events of 1989-90 drastically changed the situation for a large segment of the East-Elbian nobility. For the majority of Pomeranians, East-Prussians and Silesians, whose estates had laid beyond the Oder-Neisse line, the fall of the Wall had no material consequences, as their lands remained part of Poland, and to a small degree, Russia. However, the situation shifted dramatically for families originating from the areas between the rivers Elbe and Oder. Their ancestral lands, which had been forcefully expropriated some forty-five years before, were once again within reach. The new circumstances placed this group in a very peculiar position. Over forty years after their expulsion from the family estates, their relationship to the land was about to be transformed again. Suddenly, their ancestral lands were part of the country they were citizens of.

This chapter assesses the profound impact of the events of 1989-90 on the history management of the East-Elbian nobility. The protracted political and legal controversy over expropriation and restitution, the initially difficult reintegration of the expellees, and the eventual return of a few hundred families to the region between Elbe and Oder created new points of

departure. The process of reestablishment depended not only on the efforts of the returnee families to integrate themselves into their new ('old') communities, but also on how they managed to present themselves in the eyes of the public. Numerous exhibitions and individual communal encounters, as well as the strategic use of the mass media, significantly helped the nobility to partly regain its position among an often still-deprecating East German society.

The Problem of Restitution

The overwhelming majority of the nobility had been expelled at the end of the Second World War. Only months later, in September 1945, the Soviet Military Administration pushed for comprehensive land reform in its occupational zone, and subsequently, more than ten thousand estates spanning over more than three million hectares were forcefully expropriated, partitioned and redistributed among landless peasants.⁴ Overnight, thousands of property owners, many of them belonging to the nobility, were forced to vacate their estates and leave their ancestral land between Elbe and Oder.

Once the Wall came down in November 1989, and reunification of Germany became an increasingly tangible option throughout the course of 1990, the prospects for the nobility of regaining this land improved dramatically. As

⁴ Felbick, *Schlagwörter der Nachkriegszeit*, p. 128; see also: Verordnung über die Bodenreform im Lande Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Verordnung Nr. 19) vom 5.9.1945, cited in: Gesamtdeutsches Institut - Bundesanstalt für gesamtdeutsche Aufgaben (ed.), *Bestimmungen der DDR zu Eigentumsfragen und Enteignungen* (Bonn, 1971), p. 113.

soon as the borders were open, dozens of families set off to explore their former estates.⁵ In the previous decades, such journeys had represented memorial pilgrimages to ensure the survival of a collective memory and strengthen the family's identity. Now they held a different purpose. Expellee families wanted to ascertain what had become of their land and explore possibilities of reacquisition or even restitution. Firmly rooted in the socio-political and constitutional concepts of a society founded on the sanctity of private property, West German citizens expected nothing less than full restitution. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Federal Republic of Germany had prided itself for decades on being the liberal and law-abiding counter example for the suppressive and illicit regime in Eastern Germany. The property right was regarded as one of the highest values of West German society, even guaranteed by Article 14 of the Basic Law. In contrast to nationalisation and collectivisation in the Communist East, the West German post-war government had not only denounced the expropriations, but simultaneously paid reparations to refugees affected by it.⁶ In doing so,

⁵ See numerous examples such as Hans-Georg von der Marwitz, Friedrich-Carl von Ribbeck, Friedrich-Carl von Hardenberg, Ferdinand von Lochow, Guido zu Lynar, Alard von Arnim, Bernhard von Barsewisch; See: Feudale Sozialarbeiter, *Die Zeit*, 14.02.2013; Nach 1990 kehrten adlige Familien nach Brandenburg zurück – manche sind schon wieder weg, *Berliner Zeitung*, 23.08.2001; Alter Adel, neue Pläne, *Tageszeitung*, 01.08.2014; Mit den Hardenbergs kam die Hoffnung nach Lietzen, *WELT am Sonntag*, 18.02.2001; Der Adel ist zurück, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 11.12.2012; Der Adel kehrt nach Brandenburg zurück, *WELT*, 28.11.2005; 800 Jahre in der Mark – Spuren der Familie von Arnim, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 14.12.2003; Helga Calsow, née von Winterfeld, Bericht über den ersten Besuch genau 44 Jahre nach der Vertreibung vom ehemaligen Rittergut Krieschow-Wiesendorf im Kreis Cottbus, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband, (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts von Winterfeld(t)*, 6. Teil, 7. Band, 2009, p. 37.

⁶ Lothar F. Neumann, Klaus Schaper, *Die Sozialordnung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 2008), p. 281.

the FRG enmeshed the old elites into a post-war democratic society, significantly aiding their positive integration.⁷

With this in mind, it must have come as a shock to many expellees when, on 15 June 1990, both the governments of the FRG and the GDR concertedly announced, “the expropriations under occupation law or on the basis of sovereign acts by occupying powers (45-49) are no longer reversible”.⁸ The treaty of reunification, signed on 3 October 1990, confirmed this procedure and thereby retrospectively signed off on the Soviet land reform.

To understand this policy, one has to consider the government’s unique point of departure. On the one hand, when confronted with reunification in the summer of 1990, the government was perfectly aware of the wrath a refusal to revert the land reform between 1945 and 1949 would incur among the old owners. Any such refusal would be interpreted as a breach of Article 14 of the Basic Law, guaranteeing the right of property.⁹ On the other hand, it also recognised that a policy of full restitution might trigger social upheaval in East Germany. Thousands of smallholding families, who had received land during the land reform, would need to be forced off their land to make

⁷ Conze, *Von Deutschem Adel*, p. 194. Hereto see also the section “From Marwitz to Stauffenberg: How President Heuss Established a Link between Resistance and Nobility” in chapter II of this thesis.

⁸ Theodor Schweisfurth, The International Law Commission’s Articles on State Responsibility and the German Federal Constitutional Court, in: Ulrich Fastenrath, Rudolf Geiger, Daniel-Erasmus Khan, Andreas Paulus, Sabine von Schorlemer, Christoph Vedder (eds), *From Bilateralism to Community Interest* (New York, 2011), pp. 1298–1317, here p. 1304. See full German version in: Werner Weidenfeld und Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Handbuch zur Deutschen Einheit* (Frankfurt a. M., 1999), p. 405.

⁹ Christoph Rechberg, *Restitutionsverbot, Die Bodenreform 1945 als Finanzierungsinstrument für die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands 1990, Eine Dokumentation* (Munich, 1996), p. 45

space for the return of the previous owners. The Kohl government thus tacitly welcomed the statement of the de Maiziere government in April 1990, explicitly requesting that the Soviet land reform be sanctioned as an indispensable prerequisite for German reunification.¹⁰ The West German government tried to sell this constitutionally dubious arrangement to its citizens by claiming a kind of geopolitical *force majeure*. "The Soviets made the preservation of these measures a precondition of reunification. [...] The unity of Germany could not fail because of this."¹¹

Critical observers, however, were quick to point out that the Kohl government was in reality more concerned about voting behaviour in the rural districts of the GDR than about the opposition of the Soviets. With general elections approaching, the CDU was desperate not to alienate the East German populace.¹² A flat-out restitution, the government was convinced, would seriously hamper its chances in the planned all-German elections. Millions of East German voters would have regarded a revocation of the land reform as a betrayal of the people. A mass rejection of the CDU by the GDR populace might even jeopardise the Kohl government's plans for German unification. There was an additional important consideration. From the very beginning, the West German government had identified millions of hectares of state-owned land in East Germany as an asset that could be used

¹⁰ For the de Maiziere statement see: Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 337.

¹¹ See Helmut Kohl's speech at the Bundestag on 30.01.1991, Bundespresse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung vom 31.01.1991. Cited in: Constanze Paffrath, *Macht und Eigentum, Die Enteignungen 1945–1949 im Prozeß der Deutschen Wiedervereinigung* (Cologne, 2004), p. 384.

¹² See: Am Anfang der Einheit stand eine Lüge, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29.01.2004.

to refinance the enormous cost of reunification. Immense proceeds were expected from the reprivatisation of arable land and forestry. The government hoped to distract attention from the illegality of the whole procedure by referring to the conditions supposedly imposed by the Soviets, conditions that had to be met to achieve reunification.¹³

This line of argument quickly came unstuck when President Gorbachev himself announced in a sequence of interviews that “the topic of restitution of expropriated property” had “never been addressed at the highest level”.¹⁴ The former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze also declared “there were no preconditions for German reunification”.¹⁵ Shevardnadze went even further. He revealed that he had offered to drop the contested passage of the reunification treaty, but had been overruled by both the West and East German governments.¹⁶ In retrospect, it becomes apparent that the East German government had come up with the request for reasons of social tranquillity while the West German government was particularly interested in the popular vote, as well as possible future revenue from the divestment of land. The Soviets merely played along.

¹³ Klaus Schroeder, *Die veränderte Republik – Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich, 2006), pp. 182, 183.

¹⁴ Michail Gorbachev, Die Einheit war eine Sache der Deutschen, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17.03.1998; See also Gorbachev’s interview with the British historian Norman Stone in 1994 in which, for the first time, he denied any allegations that the Soviet Union had ever demanded a prohibition of restitution, See: Filippo Ranieri, Die Rückkehr des Privateigentums in die frühere DDR: die deutsche Justiz zwischen Rechtsgeschichte, Rechtsdogmatik und Rechtspolitik, in: Gerd Bender und Ulrich Falk (eds), *Recht im Sozialismus: Analysen zur Normdurchsetzung in osteuropäischen Nachkriegsgesellschaften (1944/45-1989), Volume 1: Enteignung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1999), p. 207.

¹⁵ Rechberg, *Restitutionsverbot*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Gesprächsnotiz Auswärtiges Amt, Zwei-Plus-Vier-Gespräche vom 17/18.08.1990, cited in: Rechberg, *Restitutionsverbot*, p. 45.

Whatever the underpinning reason, the position adopted by the two German partner governments was hard to swallow for the majority of landowners who had been expropriated between 1945 and 1949. It was especially difficult for expellees to accept, given that expropriations that had occurred *after* the founding of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 generally *were* reversed after reunification in 1990. Thus, to many, reunification felt like a second expropriation. For decades, thousands of expellees had yearned for reunification, confident that when such a moment arrived, the right of property, as promised by the constitution, would be honoured by their state which for decades had presented itself as the liberal counterfoil to the *Unrechtsstaat* in the East, a regime that had caused so much hardship and misery amongst the East-Elbian nobility.¹⁷

The old landowners lost no time in filing constitutional complaints. However, over the next two decades, the Federal Constitutional Court repeatedly rejected a series of class actions by victims of the Soviet land reform between 1945 and 1949,¹⁸ thereby putting a definitive end to the hopes of the old owners to obtain restitution.¹⁹

¹⁷ See: Berlin-Brandenburgische Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg – Ihr heutiges Engagement und das Wirken ihrer Vorfahren 1806–2000* (Berlin, 2001), p. 42.

¹⁸ BVerfG, Beschluss vom 18. 4. 1996 – I BvR 1452/90, in: *Deutsches Verwaltungsblatt*, Ausgabe 12 (1996), pp. 665–669; Pressemitteilung des Bundesverfassungsgerichts Nr. 78/79 vom 12. Dezember 1996, online at: archiv.jura.uni-saarland.de/Entscheidungen/presse96/BVerfG/enteign.html; Thilo Oldiges, *Das Bundesverfassungsgericht in der Krise?*, Seminararbeit (Berlin, 1996), pp. 12–13.

¹⁹ BVerfG, Beschluss des Zweiten Senats vom 26. Oktober 2004 – 2 BvR 955/00 – Rn. (1–160), online at: www.bverfg.de/e/rs20041026_2bvr095500.html; European Court of Human Rights, Inadmissibility Decision von Maltzan and others, von Zitzewitz and others and MAN

Yet, although the Federal Constitutional Court had repeatedly rejected the claims for restitution, it did call on the federal government to financially compensate the claimants for their losses during the post-war land reform. The compensation law passed in 1994, however, was merely a goodwill gesture rather than proper compensation. Any asset exceeding the value of a thousand Reichsmark at the time of expropriation was offset by five per cent of the actual value of the asset.²⁰ At the same time, more than two million hectares of reform land remained in the possession of the state, forming an enormous cash reserve to refinance the cost of reunification.²¹ The only real advantage the compensation law yielded for the old owners was a discounted price and preferential access of to up to 1,000 ha of reform land. A right to reacquire specific ancestral land was not guaranteed. Considering the enormous importance ancestral land had to noble identity, this restriction ultimately led to further resentment among the noble returnees.

The majority of former owners found it very difficult to make peace with the new situation. In the beginning, many of them perceived the government's conduct as "overt injustice" or blamed it on the government's overriding interest in winning the general election in the East. Others even went as far

Ferrostaal and Alfred Töpfer Stiftung v. Germany, Press release 30.03.2005, online at: hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-1304294-1360416.

²⁰ Gesetz über die Entschädigung nach dem Gesetz zur Regelung offener Vermögensfragen und über staatliche Ausgleichsleistungen für Enteignungen auf besatzungsrechtlicher und besatzungshoheitlicher Grundlage (Entschädigungs- und Ausgleichleistungsgesetz – EALG), Article 2, Gesetz über staatliche Ausgleichsleistungen für Entschädigungen auf besatzungsrechtlicher und besatzungshoheitlicher Grundlage, die nicht mehr rückgängig gemacht werden können (Ausgleichleistungsgesetz) § 2, Section 2, *Bundesgesetzblatt*, 1994, Part 1, No. 65, p. 2629.

²¹ Bodenverwertungs- und verwaltungs GmbH, *Geschäftsbericht 2000* (Berlin, 2001), p. 15.

as accusing the government of handling stolen property and even of a blatant “perversion of justice”.²² Many potential returnees renounced their intention to return to the land of their forefathers, left too frustrated and disappointed by the whole restitution controversy. Others did not have the capital to buy back dilapidated estates that were themselves in urgent need of investment. Some had simply become estranged from the rural life of the East and were unwilling to give up the life they had built in the West. However, a significant number did return to the lands east of the Elbe to rebuild the estates and continue the often centuries-old family history.²³

The Reestablishment of the Patrimonial System

Ancestral land, as we have seen, had always been the focal point of the nobility’s identity, if not always of its material survival. The fiction of continuity was rooted in the idealised bond between squire and land. Many of the expelled families had partly grown up on the estates in the East and had personal memories and relationships with the land and its people. It is

²² Preußisch Blau: Jörg Thadeusz besucht den Adel in Brandenburg – Familie von Lochow, *Rundfunk Berlin Brandenburg Fernsehen*, 29.12.2013; Matthias von Oppen, wall text, exhibition “Heimat Verpflichtet: Märkische Adlige – Eine Bilanz nach 20 Jahren”, Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 11/2012 – 04/2013; Friedrich von Ribbeck, wall text, “Heimat Verpflichtet”; Hans-Georg von der Marwitz, wall text, “Heimat Verpflichtet”.

²³ Estimates are very difficult to obtain. Some newspaper articles mention various numbers in the low hundreds. What makes it even more difficult is the fact that not every noble returnee belonged to the traditional East-Elbian elite this thesis is concerned with. Examples, such as Prince Solms or the Prince of Hannover who bought back large estates in East Germany, do certainly fit into the category of noble returnees, but neither belonged to the traditional East-Elbian elite nor had their ancestral family seat in the area. Those estates were simply additional property. See: Ein bißchen Kultur, *SPIEGEL*, 27.04.1992; Personal interview with Martina Schellhorn, the curator of the exhibition “Heimat Verpflichtet”, on 10.03.2015. Schellhorn referred to a few dozen returnees to Brandenburg.

thus hardly surprising that so many noble families should have set out to return to their old estates. Some were driven by the “marching orders of their forebears”²⁴, some by “the responsibility for ‘their’ land and people”²⁵ and others felt the “obligation”²⁶ to follow in the tradition of the family and continue the centuries old family history. Such idealising motives constantly recur throughout the accounts of noble returnees.

Another key incentive, however, was clearly the desire to re-establish and revive a fitting and ‘traditional’ noble way of life. For decades, the lost patrimonial world in the East had been bemoaned within the collective memory of the East-Elbian nobility. Even though most of the noble refugees had started over in the west and had become integral and successful parts of West German democratic society, the majority still longed for a return to the estates and the associated hereditary social superiority within its local communities. Finally, the opportunity to acquire a sizeable amount of land at a discounted rate, notwithstanding the complexities of the restitution process, was financially attractive. Large contiguous areas of agricultural land and forestry, on sale at a favourable price, have hardly ever been a poor investment.

²⁴ Friedrich von Ribbeck, wall text, “Heimat Verpflichtet”.

²⁵ Hans-Leopold von Winterfeld, Das Schicksal der Winterfeld(t)schen Güter nach dem Fall der Mauer, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), Geschichte des Geschlechts von Winterfeld(t), 6. Teil, 7. Band, 2009, p. 31.

²⁶ Peter Becker, Portrait von Rochus Graf zu Lynar: Über Mosambique und Portugal ins Spreewaldschloß, online at: www.spreewaldoriginale.de/rzuylynar.html.

Reliable numbers of how many families returned and actually stayed are difficult to obtain. Estimates range from 100 to 250 families.²⁷ Just as little is known about how much land and forest they reacquired or rented, or how much they invested in redeveloping the estates and reconstructing the manor houses. Most of this data is only available for individual cases.²⁸ The majority of returnees appear to have made full use of the purchase clause guaranteed in the compensation law of 1994, allowing them to procure up to 1,000 ha of land at a discounted price. With time, some of them certainly acquired additional land, though the average most likely was only in the upper hundreds. Most of the families returned within the first few years after reunification. With the constitutional complaints still pending, the often-difficult ownership situations induced many to initially rent their ancestral land before buying it in the mid-1990s. Among the returnees were many prominent names of East Elbia. Hans-Georg von der Marwitz acquired around 900 ha in Friedersdorf.²⁹ Karl Wilhelm Graf von Finckenstein repurchased Alt Madlitz and the surrounding latifundia. Gebhard Graf von Hardenberg regained several thousand hectares of the originally more than 7,000 ha estate at Neu-Hardenberg.³⁰ Heinrich Graf von Bassewitz returned to the 1,400 ha estate of Gut Dalwitz.³¹ Barbara von Oppen reacquired land at

²⁷ See footnote 26 of this chapter.

²⁸ The families keep the numbers of their financial investments close to their chest. Some estimates are given in: Aufbau Ost – Gefühl von Heimat, *SPIEGEL*, 04.09.2006.

²⁹ Alter Adel, Neue Pläne, *Tageszeitung*, 01.08.2014; Hans Georg von der Marwitz, Biografien, Der Bundestag, online at:

www.bundestag.de/bundestag/abgeordnete18/biografien/M/marwitz_hans_georg/258776.

³⁰ Das Erbe der Hardenbergs, *FOCUS*, 30.09.1996; For the pre-war size of the estate see: Horst Mühleisen, Patrioten im Widerstand – Carl Hans Graf von Hardenbergs Erlebnisbericht, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 41:3 (1993), pp. 422–423.

³¹ Die Enteignung der Gutsbesitzer, *NDR*, 05.12.2009.

Kröchlendorff.³² Alongside them, many other prominent families such as the Arnims, Bernstorffs and Bülowes returned and resettled.

The reception of the old squires by the local population proved to be predominantly negative, often anchored in old prejudices originating from the days of expropriation and expulsion. For decades, the nobility had been frowned upon in the former workers' and peasants' state. The returnees often faced open hostility in the East, regardless of whether their families had been fascist or not. "Counts are *Junkers* and responsible for the exploitation of the rural people".³³ Such generalising comments were daily fare. Count Hardenberg remembered people demonstratively ignoring him, remarking – "into the air" – that they would never work for a Count.³⁴ Helmuth Freiherr von Maltzahn experienced a similar reception from the head of the local agricultural co-operative who unambiguously advised the Baron to pack his things and disappear.³⁵ In some cases, the returnees even faced threats of open violence. The mayor of Friedersdorf, the ancestral estate of the Marwitz family, reported that there had been talk of setting fire to the caravan in which Hans-Georg von der Marwitz was staying during the restoration of his manor house.³⁶ Beatrix Countess Lynar spoke of psychological terror and occasional death threats.³⁷ In the GDR, the nobility had been regarded as a

³² Von Geschichte und Gegenwart der von Arnims in der Uckermark, *Prenzlauer Zeitung*, 11.09.2002.

³³ Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg*, p. 42.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gefühl von Heimat, *SPIEGEL*, 04.09.2006.

³⁶ Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg*, p. 42.

³⁷ Gefühl von Heimat, *SPIEGEL*, 04.09.2006.

public enemy, and for many inhabitants of the region, this did not change after 1989.

There were more positive encounters that reflected the high expectations and curiosity of the local population. Ilsa-Marie von Holtzendorff, for example, recounted numerous neighbourly visits encouraging her to rebuild the manor house and revive village life.³⁸ Many elderly people who still had personal memories of the former squires welcomed their return and paid their respects to the returnees.³⁹ Count Bassewitz even claimed that without the extraordinary help of the village community, he would have most likely left Gut Dalwitz a few years after his return.⁴⁰ Similarly, Friedrich-Christoph von Saldern referred to the significant help and support of the local farmers.⁴¹ Yet, such positive receptions do seem to have been rare. They generally only happened in areas where the social composition of the villages had not changed significantly. Where old ties and individual positive memories of the expelled squires were able to survive, a positive reception after reunification was possible. In areas with high social fluctuation and many newcomers, however, the decades' old prejudice of a

³⁸ Preußisch Blau, Familie von Holtzendorff, *RBB*, 28.12.2013.

³⁹ Helga Calsow, *née* von Winterfeld, Bericht über den ersten Besuch genau 44 Jahre nach der Vertreibung vom ehemaligen Rittergut Krieschow-Wiesendorf im Kreis Cottbus, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), *Geschichte des Geschlechts von Winterfeld(t)*, 6. Teil, 7. Band, 2009, pp. 38, 39; Preußisch Blau, Familie zu Lynar, *RBB*, 26.12.2013; See also: Erinnerungen des Hans-Leopold von Winterfeldt, *Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung und die langwierige Rückkehr der Familie nach Nieden und Damerow in die alt angestammte Heimat*, in: DAA, FG Win, von Winterfeld(t)scher Familienverband (ed.), 6. Teil, 7. Band, 2009, p. 54.

⁴⁰ Die Enteignung der Gutsbesitzer – Von Uruguay zurück in die Heimat: Heinrich Graf von Bassewitz, *NDR 1 Radio MW*, 15.12.2009.

⁴¹ Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg*, p. 102.

ruthless and exploitative nobility had generally fallen on fertile ground and significantly complicated the integration of the returnees.⁴² A fortiori, it was of utmost importance to the nobility to actively engage in the village life and thereby help to reduce these old prejudices and contribute to a positive reintegration into the social community.

From the very beginning, it appears that the nobility indeed tried to enter into positive social partnerships with the local population, while simultaneously resuming a leading role in the community. The fact that the noble returnees usually reacquired fairly large estates inevitably put them in a prominent position in the respective village communities. They often automatically became the largest employers, and thereby, quickly moved to the centre of economic and social life. Ultimately, this situation led to new inter-dependencies, whether desired or not. On the one hand, many locals economically benefited from the reestablishment of noble estates or the cultural and social activities many of them implemented. Conversely, a traditional role allocation did re-emerge rather quickly, as the squire and the local population fell back into old habits, even if the deference and hierarchical character of the new social relations lacked the intensity of the earlier era.

⁴² Beatrix Gräfin von Lynar vividly described how the long-time residents generally welcomed her family's return to Lübbenau in the early 1990s. For many of the families, which had been resettled to Lübbenau after the Lynars' expulsion, however, the case was different:

"For the new settlers we were intruders. They said: Watch out! If the count returns, he will throw you all out, since we sit on his land." Preußisch Blau, Familie zu Lynar, *RBB*, 26.12.2013.

The noble returnees went to considerable length to expedite this process, and thereby, regain their traditional position in the village community. They achieved this, in part, by presenting themselves as humble and vigorous men of action who did not shy away from hard manual labour. We come across noblemen living in caravans in the shadow of their ancestral ruins, or putting up temporary sheds near the construction site, to oversee the project personally, rather than handing the responsibility to contractors. We see young barons cleaning clogged cesspools and young counts tidying up decayed gardens and parks.⁴³ This openly propagated hands-on approach helped to overcome old prejudices and gain acceptance for the returned nobles among the local population.

Additionally, many returnees tried to engage in, and furthermore, actively promote, communal life in the local villages. Many offered their large houses or empty farm buildings for communal and cultural events. Hans-Georg von der Marwitz provided an old barn and guidance to establish a communal centre for local art and craftsmanship at Friedersdorf. Bernhard von Barsewisch founded an association which funded the restoration of the local manor house and turned it into a regional museum; Karl-Christoph von Stünzner-Karbe regularly opens parts of his manor house to public lectures and concerts; Hermann von Pückler sponsored a kindergarten in Branitz; Count Hardenberg cordially invited the entire village into his new home to obviate probable reservations; and Helmuth von Maltzahn set up annual

⁴³ Preußisch Blau, Familie von der Marwitz, *RBB*, 30.12.2013; Gefühl von Heimat, *SPIEGEL*, 04.09.2006.

classical concerts, which have become known far beyond the borders of Mecklenburg.⁴⁴

These initiatives contributed to the cultural revival of the East-Elbian countryside. More importantly, however, they facilitated the reintegration of the returnees into the local communities. Strong social engagement showed the locals that the noble families had come to stay and were not only focused on enhancing their estates, but also willing to contribute to the development of the area. Social acceptance thereby grew accordingly, and with it came a gradual return to the traditional social pyramid. The old families often resumed leading positions in the local communities and started to shape public life. Mutual trust began to be re-established and quasi-patrimonial relationships resurfaced. Many nobles took over honorary positions in the local communities or churches. Barbara von Oppen and Gebhard von Hardenberg were elected into the local, as well as the church, councils. Hermann von Pückler became a senator of the University of Cottbus, and Hans-Georg von der Marwitz represents his constituency in the German Bundestag.⁴⁵ In some cases, the reawakening of paternalism even reached long-lost dimensions. Shortly after their return, the Solms family celebrated

⁴⁴ For Marwitz see: www.kunstspeicher-friedersdorf.de; For Barsewisch see: Der Adel kehrt nach Brandenburg zurück – Familien bauen Schlösser auf und gründen Museen, *WELT*, 28.11.2005; For Stünzner-Karbe see: Preußisch Blau, Familie von Stünzner-Karbe, *RBB*, 28.12.2014; For Pückler see: Mit dem Pendel auf der Suche nach den Ahnen – Der Aufschwung nach der Wende: Wie Hermann Graf von Pückler, der Urgroßneffe des berühmten Fürsten von Pückler, seinen Familiensitz in Branitz mit neuem Leben erfüllt, *WELT am Sonntag*, 10.12.2000; For Maltzahn see: www.ulrichshusen.de/de/festspielort.html.

⁴⁵ Die Rückkehr des Blauen Blutes, online at: www.vonarnim.com/presse/RueckkehrdesblauenBlutes.pdf; Mit den Hardenbergs kam die Hoffnung nach Lietzen, *WELT*, 18.02.2001; Mit dem Pendel auf der Suche nach den Ahnen, *WELT*, 10.12.2000; Alter Adel, Neue Pläne, *Die Tageszeitung*, 01.08.2014.

their four hundred year presence at Baruth. To mark this special occasion, the current count and countess arrived at the festivities in a horse-drawn carriage, flanked by twenty riders and cheered on by the local population of Baruth, who handed them presents and dutifully paid their respects.⁴⁶ Yet, such examples remain the exception. The majority of noble returnees refrained from such ostentatious displays.

A New Phase of History Management

In resuming a dominant position in their local communities, the nobility subtly put their centuries-old power to work. The first step in their multi-dimensional history management project was the safeguarding of the often-fragile economic base of the new estates. Without an economically self-sufficient estate, a successful and permanent return to East Elbia was impossible. The large majority of the returnees were by no means wealthy capitalists who had large fortunes at their disposal to allow them to run a deficient estate. On the contrary, most of them were forced to take up substantial loans in order to rebuild their existence. Economic success became the ultimate prerequisite for social pre-eminence. Without being able to offer economic stability and work to the local population, no kind of patrimonial relationship would be feasible. Many of the returnees enhanced and diversified their estates in order to enlarge their product range and revive the local economy. These enterprises were not the fruit of an abstract and timeless economic rationality; they were deeply shaped by each family's

⁴⁶ Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg*, p. 193.

historical awareness. Family histories were crucial to the success of these projects. The returnees set up businesses that were directly or indirectly related to the family tradition or drew heavily from the family's previous achievements.

Inspired by Theodor Fontane's famous poem about one of his pear-loving ancestors, Friedrich-Carl von Ribbeck restored the dilapidated distillery and set up a modest pear-brandy production.⁴⁷ The eponymous village in the Havelland owes much of its popularity as a tourist attraction to Fontane's description of the affectionate old squire who handed out pears to the local children and ensured their supply beyond his death by having a pear tree planted on his grave.⁴⁸ A pear-brandy, distilled by a direct descendant of the famous "Lord Ribbeck of Ribbeck in Havelland", itself quickly became one of the village's main attractions. Ribbeck was fully aware of the poem's touristic value and calculated that it would be foolish "not to use the marketing push that Fontane provided".⁴⁹ By choosing to distil a pear-brandy, von Ribbeck cleverly managed to establish a link between family history and a modern local product. Fontane's poem enabled the customer to identify the brandy as an old family tradition, associating the product with longevity, reliability and integrity. It was a priceless marketing asset.

Ferdinand von Lochow also hoped to benefit from the splendour of the family's long history in the area. To add to his agricultural business, he and

⁴⁷ Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck ist wieder zu Hause, *Berliner Zeitung*, 21.01.2015; Susanne Conrad besucht Familie von Ribbeck, Landgut Havelland, *ZDF*, 27.07.2014.

⁴⁸ Theodor Fontane, *Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland* (Landsberg, 2008).

⁴⁹ Ein bißchen Kultur, *SPIEGEL*, 27.04.1992.

his wife opened a restaurant called the 'Rye-King' to sell their farm products, as well as their home brewed beer.⁵⁰ The Rye-King is a prominent reference to his famous ancestor, Ferdinand von Lochow, who was widely known as the most skilled rye cultivator of Prussia.⁵¹ Building on this history, the home-brewed rye beer and the restaurant are promoted accordingly, with marketing content constantly referring to the family's longstanding experience in the business.

Hubertus Count Hahn von Burgsdorff followed a similar approach when he restarted the production of a traditional local bitter orange liqueur. Advertising for this product, which is supposedly distilled using "generation-old recipes", he explicitly associated the liqueur with the history of the Hahn family. Countless pictures of the old castle and orangery, where the fruit – "a status symbol of European princes"⁵² – had traditionally been grown, provide the product with a nimbus of historical authenticity and considerably add to its appeal. In such cases, though the effect is not precisely measurable, the family history offers credibility to the product and thus contributes to its success.

The various hotels that have been established in old manor houses and castles also draw heavily from the history of the noble families. The Lynars at Lübbenau, the Stünzner-Karbes at Sieversdorf and the Thüngens at Groß Ziethen have all dedicated long sections of their websites to the family

⁵⁰ Preußisch Blau, Familie von Lochow, *RBB*, 20.12.2014.

⁵¹ Jonathan Harwood, Politische Ökonomie der Pflanzenzucht in Deutschland ca. 1870–1933, in: Susanne Heim (ed.), *Autarkie und Ostexpansion, Pflanzenzucht und Agrarforschung im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2002), p. 16.

⁵² Alte Pomeranze, online at: www.alte-pomeranze.de/geschichte/.

history.⁵³ Often rooms are named after famous family members and notable events of the family history are prominently portrayed throughout the hotels. The chance to stay in historic buildings, especially if these are still owned by the respective family, appears to retain considerable appeal, comparable perhaps to the massive tourist traffic attracted to country houses administered by the National Trust in Britain.⁵⁴ The presence of the family adds certain flair to the experience.

In conclusion, all these small businesses borrow heavily from the respective family histories. The noble returnees have generally been rather astute in exploiting their family histories by tapping memories and anecdotes to support their business ventures in the present. Images of family tradition and expertise are designed to insinuate the longevity, integrity and reliability of the product. As a consequence, these small businesses receive invaluable symbolic starting capital and thereby significantly help the families to strengthen their position in the local community. The family history had always been a tool of rehabilitation and collective legitimation; in recent years, it has acquired commercial value.

As already discussed, the noble returnees showed great commitment when it came to rebuilding old estates, and entering into new social relationships with the local communities. They also invested in reconstructing and

⁵³ Schloss Luebbenau im Spreewald, online at: www.schloss-luebbenau.de; Gutshaus Sieversdorf, online at: www.gutshaus-sieversdorf.de; Schloss Ziethen im Havelland, online at: www.schlossziethen.de.

⁵⁴ See: Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (London, 1997), see especially the chapters: Tourism refined and The Stately Home Business, pp. 209–221 and pp. 369–388; Also see the chapter: Tourism and Repair Grants 1974–1998 in: John Cornforth, *The Country Houses of England 1948–1998* (London, 1998), pp. 207–241.

replenishing their popular image by finding outlets to legitimise and defend their own specific narrative of the past. To regain popular acceptance, it was vital to actively counter the persistent stereotype of the cold-hearted and authoritarian Junker.⁵⁵ Many of the returnees thus participated in what we might call a 'history offensive', emphasising the nobility's achievements across the centuries and rehabilitating the traditional patrimonial system, which was widely regarded as the root of all social injustice in East German society. One popular way of furthering this process was to curate small exhibitions in manor houses or participate actively in larger travelling exhibitions set up by government agencies or museums.

At Lübbenau, the Lynars are planning to set up a small museum, similar to the one which existed in the 1930s. The aim is "to offer insights into the family chronicle of the counts of Lynar and the eventful history of their castle Lübbenau".⁵⁶ Especially for the Lynars, who met with steep resistance from the local population upon their return in the early 1990s, such an endeavour provides the ideal platform to inform locals as well, as visitors, of their side of the story, and thereby gain influence over the interpretation of events and opinions. The family have, for the first time, secured a platform on which to present for public consumption the atrocities the family experienced after their involvement in the military resistance against Hitler, and their subsequent expulsion from their ancestral estate in 1945.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, a detailed study about the connotations and applications of the term "Junker" is still missing. For an extended definition see: Reif, *Die Junker*, in: Francois und Schulze (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, pp. 520–536.

⁵⁶ Kanzlei – Das Historische Gedächtnis, Schlossmuseum at Lübbenau, online at: www.schloss-luebbenau.de/de/kanzlei.html.

Whereas the museum only forms a small part of the castle complex at Lübbenau, Bernhard von Barsewisch restored the entirety of Wolfshagen castle specifically and exclusively to house a museum dedicated to rare porcelain, and the history of the surrounding gentry.⁵⁷ For years, he campaigned for this project, and also personally donated generously for its reconstruction. The museum is intended both to display a typical Prussian pre-1945 manor house, and to commemorate the destruction of noble life after the Second World War. Today, it houses one of the largest collections of portraits of local squires in the area. The Barsewisch collection actively engages in the presentation of this history, is conceived with the aim of shaping a new and more positive perception of the nobility and its heritage.

Similarly, Friedrich-Christoph von Saldern has actively promoted the rehabilitation of the history of his family, and the nobility in general. In 1999, he founded a "history-club for the Prignitz, whose main purpose is to promote 'historical truth'".⁵⁸ Historical truth, however, is a contentious matter. What von Saldern's club actually propagates is a portrayal of history as he and his sympathisers see it, or want to see it. It is nothing less than an attempt to regain the prerogative of interpretation, and is hence a classic example of history management.

Two other large exhibitions have significantly reshaped the nobility's popular image in Eastern Germany. In 2001, the Berlin-Brandenburgische Geschichtswerkstatt, a charitable organisation designed to promote research

⁵⁷ Schloss-Museum Wolfshagen Prignitz, online at: www.schlossmuseum-wolfshagen.com.

⁵⁸ Geschichtswerkstatt (ed.), *Adlige Rückkehrer im Land Brandenburg*, p. 105.

on the regional history of Berlin and Brandenburg, curated an exhibition about noble returnees to Brandenburg.⁵⁹ Building on this, the Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung mounted another, even larger, exhibition in 2012, aiming to “acknowledge the achievements of noble returnees”.⁶⁰ Martina Schellhorn, the exhibition’s curator, visited eleven families to observe and record the progress they had made twenty years after their return. What is remarkable about these interviews is, once again, their highly compelling narrative. Whether it is the reasons for their return, their social commitment in the villages, or the constant references to their long family history in the region, reading these interviews, one gets the impression that the return of all these families was purely driven by their responsibility to their family history and to honouring their duty to society. As observed in the family chronicles and autobiographies, we once again come across a significantly glorified narrative, designed to control, alter and enhance the motivations, and hence the image, of the East-Elbian nobility. Unsurprisingly, Martina Schellhorn revealed that following her second interview, the remaining families were all well-aware of her project before they had even been approached, suggesting that diligent infra-corporate communication had accompanied the whole process.⁶¹

The exhibition proved to be a great success and “many visitors came forward admitting that they had still been stuck in old thought patterns and clung to

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Martina Schellhorn, *Märkische Adlige – eine Bilanz nach 20 Jahren*, Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (Potsdam, 2014), p. 5.

⁶¹ Personal Interview with Martina Schellhorn, 10.03.2015.

a different conception of history”.⁶² Ultimately, however, this state sponsored initiative proved to be much more than simply another piece in the puzzle of noble history management. It also signalled to the noble returnees that after decades of state directed ostracism, and the controversies over restitution in the 1990s, that the government was finally recognising and supporting the nobility’s engagement in and return to East Elbia. This notion was powerfully reinforced when the former Social Democratic Prime Minister of Brandenburg, Manfred Stolpe, officially labelled the anti-noble measurements of the SED government as “unjust” and simultaneously praised the nobles’ contribution to the “cultural development of Prussia and the modernisation of its agrarian economy”. Nowadays, he claimed, the returnees are “important partners for the village communities, the economy and the intellectual-cultural life” of the area, and thereby, they are becoming “important development aid workers” in Eastern Germany.⁶³ Such public acknowledgement of the nobility’s importance to the rural regions of East Germany was balm for the noble soul.

Consequently, the importance of this exhibition was manifold. On the one hand, it offered the noble returnees a sympathetic platform from which to relate their side of history and counteract negative narratives. On the other hand, it showed that the government was now willing to contribute to the education and instruction of a still sceptical East German population. Due to its considerable success, the exhibition had one more invaluable effect; it

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Manfred Stolpe im Gespräch: “Wir haben es gut getroffen mit dem märkischen Adel”, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26.05.2001.

increased the already strong public interest in the noble returnees, and resulted in numerous television documentaries that provided the nobility with a further means of shaping its public image.

In addition to rebuilding the nobility's social standing in the village communities, numerous noble returnees also began to participate in a larger enterprise, which was designed to revitalise the nobility's trans-regional public image. The two main pillars of this new phase of history management were an active cooperation with the press and strategic collaboration with television productions known to cast the nobility in a positive light. Journalists and publicists have an enormous impact on the dissemination of interpretations of history. In light of the paramount importance of mass media and public opinion, it is difficult to overestimate the role journalists play in the management of historical issues and the contemporary interpretation of history.⁶⁴ Maintaining favourable relationships with journalists thus promises to yield significant advantages when it comes to constructing and legitimising a certain narrative for public consumption.

From the very beginning, the topic of restitution received substantial coverage in the national, as well as regional, press. The debates about whether the land reform and the government's refusal to restore confiscated property to the old owners were just or not, catapulted the noble returnees into the spotlight of public interest. The numerous decisions of the Federal Court of Justice remained one of the prevailing topics of public interest

⁶⁴ Conze, *Aufstand des preußischen Adels*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, p. 485.

throughout the first decade after reunification.⁶⁵ By the time the legal question had been resolved, several noble families had settled in the East and managed to re-establish themselves in the local communities. Encouraged by the cultural and social commitment of the noble returnees, as well as the publicity these stories promised, almost every major national and regional newspaper published articles concerning committed and energetic noblemen trying to rebuild their dilapidated family estates.

The noble returnees are portrayed as courageous “pioneers, in areas which are in desperate need of development assistance”.⁶⁶ As “seigniorial social workers”, they managed to increase the appeal and attraction of the often-deserted areas in the East.⁶⁷ Repeated references to duty and responsibility, the famous *noblesse oblige*, continuously resurface in these articles.⁶⁸ Friendly journalists visit the restored estates and take tours with the noble returnees, waxing lyrical about “re-flourishing landscapes” in otherwise neglected surroundings.⁶⁹ We read about the onerous struggles involved in reacquiring the estates, about the social commitment of the new owners, and of their sense of responsibility towards their family and its history.

This all leads to the question of why journalists buy into this markedly one-sided approach. Doubtlessly, part of the answer can be found in an unforced admiration for the achievements of the returnees. Journalists may tend to be

⁶⁵ Am Anfang der Einheit stand eine Lüge, *Die Zeit*, 29.01.2004; Späte Hoffnung für die Opfer der Bodenreform, *FAZ*, 09.11.2009; Bodenreformfrage endgültig entschieden, *Handelsblatt*, 30.03.2005; Opfer verlieren vor Gericht, *STERN*, 30.03.2005.

⁶⁶ Rückkehrer und Pioniere, *Berliner Zeitung*, 02.11.2011.

⁶⁷ Feudale Sozialarbeiter, *Die Zeit*, 14.02.2013.

⁶⁸ Adel verpflichtet, *Welt*, 11.02.2001.

⁶⁹ Aufbau Ost, Gefühl von Heimat, *SPIEGEL*, 04.09.2006.

less invested in anti-Junker narratives than historians or sociologists, for whom the *Sonderweg* may have been a crucial element in their socialisation. The journalist's chief concerns are the expectations of their readers and the saleability of their story. Under these circumstances, the idea of a forcefully expelled nobleman who returns to his ancestral estate and restores the dilapidated ruins of the manor house, in the process, reviving the cultural and social life of the village, offers a highly appealing story. Journalists are often quite content with reading these exhibitions and collections at face value and accepting the narrative on offer.

Once again, it seems, the nobility emerge as masters of visibility. The conventional techniques of self-representation are still in evidence. Ever since the increasingly popular Junker-critique around the turn of the century, the nobility has been confronted with a highly critical public and has had to find ways to counter popular animosities and intervene in the interpretation of events in order to maintain its social superiority. The success of their efforts can be observed in those numerous newspaper articles that report on restored churches, sponsored kindergartens and cultural events where the noble family mingles with the locals. These benefactions, skilfully presented to journalists, help to shape the image of an altruistic caste eager to serve the local community. We might thus speak of an implicit mutual arrangement between press and noble returnees. A rather uncritical press – concerned with the saleability of the story and the wishes of its readers – provides a platform for a social caste, which is particularly keen on influencing the interpretation of history and willing to go to great lengths to achieve this goal. This, in turn, reveals why the mass media is so ideally suited to the

promotion of the nobility's history management. It is willing, before the eyes of a broad readership, to buy into the nobility's carefully pruned narratives of its own history.

Television, too, has emerged as an important platform for noble history management since the reunification of Germany. Television became a mass medium in Germany shortly after the end of the war. Yet, the nobility really only discovered television as a medium of public relations towards the turn of the twentieth century. The revival of Berlin as the capital of the united republic, as well as the festivities surrounding the 300 year anniversary of the foundation of the Kingdom of Prussia in 2001, reignited the public's interest in Germany's former royal families and its nobility in general. Live reports from the great European royal weddings and various documentaries about the Hohenzollern, Wittelsbacher and Guelphs redirected the focus on this peculiar elite.⁷⁰ The East-Elbian nobility, by contrast, made only sporadic appearances. They tended to crop up mainly in documentaries on the attempted coup of July 1944, in productions about the expulsions, or in documentaries about the final hours of the war.⁷¹

This situation changed substantially once the noble returnees had firmly re-established themselves in East Elbia. Twenty years after their return, the first

⁷⁰ Die frühen Wittelsbacher, *BR-Alpha*, 03.03.2011; Absolute Fürstenherrschaft, *BR-Alpha*, 31.03.2011; Königliche Dynastien: Die Hohenzollern – Eine Dynastie voller Gegensätze, *ZDF*, 29.07.2014; König, Kaiser, Bürger – Die preußischen Hohenzollern, *3 SAT*, 27.12.2006; Der Deutsche Adel – Das Erbe des Kaisers, *ARD*, 30.06.2013; Liebeshochzeit in Luxemburg, *ZDF Royal*, 20.10.2012; Livestream zur Hochzeit von Fürst Albert und Charlene Wittstock, *ZDF Royal*, 21.04.2011; Wallfahrt zu Diana, *ZDF*, 22.08.1998; Adel ohne Skrupel – die dunklen Geschäfte der Welfen, *ARD*, 18.08.2014.

⁷¹ Die Stunde der Offiziere, *ZDF*, 29.06.2004; Flucht und Vertreibung, *ZDF*, 06.10.2011; Der Sturm: Die Schlacht um Ostpreußen, *ZDF*, 11.01.2005.

documentaries about the nobility's return to their ancestral estates have gone to air.⁷² Following the widely well-received exhibition *Heimat verpflichtet* in 2012, numerous television productions picked up on the topic.⁷³ Like the newspaper articles discussed previously, these programmes presented viewers with an untainted story of success. The viewers see flourishing landscapes and hardworking noblemen, and hear descriptions of the families' glorious pasts. Hans Georg von der Marwitz, who features in several documentaries, shows the viewers around his refurbished estate. He inspects his fields with the film crew and, in a powerful improvised scene, personally comes to the rescue of a tractor stuck in the mud. After subtly explaining the challenges he faced upon his return and his commitment to the development of the local community, his attention is directed to the long and glorious family history, best exemplified by his famous ancestor, Johann Friedrich von der Marwitz, who famously disobeyed his king's order to loot the Saxon castle in revenge for the plundering of Charlottenburg palace. In recounting his ancestor's memorial at Friedersdorf, the interviewed noble bridges into a discussion of the East-Elbian nobility's resistance to the Third Reich.⁷⁴ In doing so, von der Marwitz rehashes all the fundamentals of the established noble history management strategy. He presents himself as a hardworking and humble squire who is dedicated to the wellbeing of his

⁷² Die Rückkehr der Junker, *Arte Info*, 03.01.2010; Alter Adel – neue Aufgaben: Hans Georg von der Marwitz, *Deutsche Welle*, 11.03.2011.

⁷³ Preußisch Blau, Jörg Thadeusz besucht den Adel in Brandenburg, *RBB*, 2013/2014; Landgut Havelland, *ZDF*, 27.07.2014; Märchenhaft: Schloss Ulrichshusen, *ZDF*, 06.08.2014.

⁷⁴ Alter Adel, Marwitz, *Deutsche Welle*; Preußisch Blau, Familie von der Marwitz; EU-Geschenke für Großbauern, *ARD*, 25.04.2013.

village, while simultaneously living up to the burden and responsibility that comes with the long standing family tradition at Friedersdorf.

Yet, Hans Georg von der Marwitz is by no means the only versatile and media-savvy member of his caste. Throughout many documentaries, we encounter noblemen who conform to this familiar criterion. Ferdinand von Lochow greets the television host from his tractor, before guiding him through the renovated rooms of his manor house.⁷⁵ While showing viewers around her restored castle Ulrichshusen, Alla von Maltzahn explains the family portraits and indicates her affiliation to Martin Luther, thereby subtly referring to the antiquity and distinction of the family.⁷⁶ Anecdotes of expulsion and the loss of *Heimat* prompt viewer compassion and sympathy and help the audience to identify with the destinies of the noble returnees. The evocative depiction of unpretentious noblemen organising popular festivities for the village community serves a similar purpose.

Finally, the noble returnees never tire of pointing out their families' traditional aversion for the Nazis. Almost every interviewee decorates his or her family history with tales of some kind of relationship with the military resistance, individual resistive action, or at least a strongly developed anti-Nazi attitude. A large portion of the documentaries about the Lynars and the Hardenbergs deals with their forefathers' involvement in the 1944 coup.⁷⁷ We see Hans Georg von der Marwitz drawing parallels between his famous

⁷⁵ Preußisch Blau, Familie von Lochow; Die Rückkehr der Junker, Ferdinand von Lochow, *Arte*, 08.01.2010.

⁷⁶ Märchenhaft: Schloss Ulrichshusen, *ZDF*, 06.08.2014.

⁷⁷ Preußisch Blau, Familie zu Lynar; Deutsche Dynastien – Die Hardenbergs, *ARD*, 18.11.2013.

ancestor who disobeyed Friedrich II and the decision of the noble officers to try to kill Hitler.⁷⁸ Friedrich von Ribbeck hints at his father's resistance to the Nazi regime and the alleged expropriation of the estate, while Count Pückler refers to his family's instinctive loathing for the regime.⁷⁹ All these subtle references collectively construct a favourable narrative of the nobility's past in order to legitimise and renew their claim to social primacy in the present.⁸⁰

Within this process, however, one must not forget that many of these topics and scenes are, to a degree, strategically stage-managed by the writers and producers of the television documentaries. Producers often pursue an agenda of their own when they fit the nobility into a generic format. As Anuschka Rother, the author of a piece regarding Helmut von Maltzahn and Ulrichshusen castle, indicated, journalists often have neither the time nor the inclination to question the self-portrayal of the nobility. "Often the main purpose of such a vignette is not a critical analysis but rather to encourage the viewers to visit the castle and cater to their desires for the still unbroken fascination of noble life."⁸¹ Susanne Conrad of the ZDF confirmed this notion by stating that "most of this uncritical approach is owed to the format". Her piece about the Ribbeck family "was mainly intended to show her viewers beautiful and placid facets of the German countryside. We wanted to portray

⁷⁸ Preußisch Blau, Familie von der Marwitz; Alter Adel, Marwitz, *Deutsche Welle*.

⁷⁹ Landgut Havelland, ZDF, 27.07.2014; Preußisch Blau, Familie von Pückler, RBB, 25.12.2014.

⁸⁰ As comparison see the nobility's attempt to distance itself from National Socialism in the autobiographies and family chronicles in chapters III & IV.

⁸¹ Personal interview with Anuschka Rother (producer of *Märchenhaft: Schloss Ulrichshusen*), 15.04.2015.

the kind Lord Ribbeck, who gave out pears to children. A critical assessment of the family's return to East Elbia would not have fitted into our program".⁸²

Hence, as much as the noble returnees want to voice their side of the story and are eager to promote their ultimate agenda, the producers are happy to play along in return for evocative and attractive clichés. Stories of a glorious past, an unbroken bond to *Heimat*, and successful reestablishment despite enormous obstacles, are ideally suited to attracting high numbers of viewers. For example, in the case of the Ribbeck documentary, the trans-generational prominence and popularity of the Fontane poem encouraged the producers to use Lord Ribbeck as the "ideal drawing card to attract viewers".⁸³ Furthermore, there is no indication that the initiative for these documentaries emanates from the nobility. On the contrary, the television stations, fully aware of their viewers' persistent desire to get a glimpse of the glamorous and elitist life of the nobility, seem to be the driving force behind these productions. Yet, the noble families, having realised the enormous potential of these formats, happily make themselves available and warmly receive the production companies into their homes.

In contrast with newspaper articles, television documentaries have propagated potent and lasting images. Powerful photo archives of the horrors and destruction of the war and the communist era, paired with depictions of hardworking returnees carefully renovating manor houses, restoring parks and rebuilding churches, have helped to form lasting positive

⁸² Personal interview with Susanne Conrad (producer of *Landgut Havelland*), 20.04.2015.

⁸³ Ibid.

associations. It is worth noting that, to an even greater extent than print journalists, documentary film crews are susceptible to strategies of domestication through hospitality. Hosting a film crew for an extended period of time significantly facilitates the cultivation of personal relationships between nobility and creators, thus enhancing the likelihood of favourable coverage. The result is vividly illustrated in a statement by Jörg Thadeusz, the writer of a multi-episode documentary about noble returnees to Brandenburg: "Once more, I am impressed by these people's sense of tradition on the one hand and their creative power on the other. Effortlessly, they incorporate traditional values into their current, contemporary life, thus preserving them without appearing even slightly antiquated. On top of that, the *élan* with which these families rebuild what has been destroyed by war and mismanagement deserves my highest respect."⁸⁴ The most enthusiastic in-house advocate of the nobility's historically legitimated pre-eminence could scarcely have put it more forcefully than this.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how skilfully the noble returnees to East Elbia have made use of their multifarious family history in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in order to re-establish themselves as a social elite in the areas of the former German Democratic Republic. When the Wall came down in November 1989 and the communist system collapsed almost overnight, the noble estates between the rivers Elbe and Oder once again seemed to be

⁸⁴ Jörg Thadeusz, *Preußisch Blau*, online at: www.rbb-online.de/preussischblau.

within reach. The prospect of substituting their largely bourgeois lifestyle in Western Germany with a return to a traditional noble life on the estates in East Elbia was highly appealing to large parts of the expelled nobility. With reunification looming, the former squires expected nothing less than full restitution. The government, however, quickly quashed these expectations. It needed the revenue expected from selling the land to partly offset the extreme costs of reunification. After protracted legal battles, the government eventually granted former owners the right to purchase land at a discounted rate. A significant number of noble families made use of this provision and bought back parts of their ancestral estates.

The nobles quickly went to work to re-establish themselves as a driving force in the rural communities. They became involved in local councils, initiated cultural events and often opened their renovated manor houses to the interested public. Furthermore, they systematically exploited their specific family histories for business purposes. Many of them launched small enterprises which directly borrowed from the particular family's rich history, thereby transforming symbolic capital into commercial value. Small breweries, distilleries or 'country house hotels' were set up as profitable side businesses, but also as visible expressions of a family's endurance. These products not only generated revenue, but also symbolised the continuity of a family's history, a concept that lies at the heart of noble identity.

At the same time, beyond the microcosm of their local communities, the noble returnees also engaged in a larger enterprise designed to revamp their trans-regional image. They founded museums and curated circulating

exhibitions in an attempt to revive the commemoration of their ancient caste and reclaim the prerogative of interpretation of collective memory. Key to their success in this endeavour was their close cooperation with the media. The protracted restitution debate, which flared up repeatedly throughout the 1990s in the press, had once more lifted the East-Elbian nobility into the public spotlight. Across countless newspaper articles and television documentaries noblemen and -women catered to the desires of a highly amenable audience. They transfigured their return to East Elbia into a romantic homecoming, guided and inspired by family duty and tradition. In doing so, the nobility significantly contributed to a successful transformation of its public image in Eastern Germany, to which end 'the exploitative Prussian Junker' has been replaced by the 'seigniorial social worker'.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Feudale Sozialarbeiter, *Die Zeit*, 14.02.2013.

A Case Study: The Hohenzollern

Introduction

The compensation law of 1994 was designed to partially indemnify the large landowners whom had been expropriated between 1945 and 1949, while minimising the damage to the social settlements established by the post-war expropriations. However, it also included a small yet important restriction. Article 2, § 1, Section 4 explicitly excluded anybody who had provided the National Socialist system with “substantial assistance”.¹ The main concern was ensuring that nobody who had assisted the regime or had profited from it would benefit from taxpayers’ money. The initial idea seemed entirely logical, yet its implementation proved to be delicate. It opened the door for rulings that were more dependent on interpretation than on facts. The main question was how to define “substantial assistance” and what fell within its scope. Did membership in the NSDAP qualify for substantial assistance or did it require a prominent party post? Did published statements in support of Hitler or his movement amount to substantial assistance? What of symbolic gestures, such as participation in a state ceremony (*Staatsakt*)?

The most prominent and vivid example of this procedure in action is the case of the Hohenzollern family, the former ruling dynasty of the kings of Prussia and the German emperors. In this special case, compensation was dependent

¹ Entschädigungs- und Ausgleichleistungsgesetz (EALG), Article 2, § 1, Section 4, *Bundesgesetzblatt*, 1994, Part 1, No. 65, p. 2629.

on moral assessments of the actions of Crown Prince Wilhelm – the head of the house and incumbent of the family fortune at the time of the family's expropriation in 1945 – before, during and after the Nazi seizure of power.

This chapter will therefore be a study of a specific East-Elbian family's history management. In examining this case, I will show not only how a prominent noble family deployed techniques of history management, but also illustrate how the legislative environment in Germany essentially obliges some families to engage in the process of influencing, shaping and controlling the interpretation of their family history. In this case, history management is not only a matter of reputation building, but also of economic interest, especially in cases, such as that of the Hohenzollern, in which the family in question aspires to maintain a high public profile through charitable work. Furthermore, this chapter will assess the dangers that may arise if the process of a family's strategic history management becomes too publicly transparent, and what ramifications this poses for public perceptions of an entire family.

The Hohenzollern, due to their elevated status as former rulers of Germany and Prussia, might not immediately appear as typical representatives of the East-Elbian nobility. Yet, the momentous upheavals of the twentieth century somewhat decreased the traditional boundaries between the ruling family and the nobility, leading to a gradual convergence. The abolition of the monarchy in 1918 and the loss of East Elbia in 1945 – the vast majority of the Hohenzollern's landed interest was situated in the areas relinquished after the Potsdam Conference – eliminated both the royal family and the nobility

as powerful political lobbies. This irrevocable loss of social and political supremacy turned the East-Elbian nobility into what Michael Seelig has termed a *Gesinnungsgemeinschaft*, in other words, a social group that distinguishes and separates itself from other social formations by virtue of its commitment to certain principles (*Geisteshaltung*).² In that respect, the Hohenzollern were no exception. In the absence of any real social or political influence, the former royal family relegated itself into the ranks of the 'ordinary' East-Elbian noble families, more concerned with private success than with public influence. This is proven accurate since the Hohenzollern shared with the rest of the nobility the formative experience of expulsion and expropriation, and were forced to start over in the west.

Inevitably, perhaps, in view of the history of this family at the apex of the East-Elbian nobility and of the Prussian/German state, the public focus directed towards the Hohenzollern family was more intense and required an even more diligent history management than in the case of other noble families. Despite its distinctive features, this family is ideally suited for a case study in noble history management.

Hohenzollern History Management in the Twentieth Century

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the Hohenzollern family have been active managers of their own history. After the expulsion in

² Michael Seelig, *Alltagsadel: Der ehemalige ostelbische Adel in der Bundesrepublik 1945/49-1975* (Cologne, 2015), p. 234. Elisabeth Gräfin von Plessen described the same process by referring to the expelled nobles as 'Weltanschauungsbesitzer'. See: Elisabeth Plessen, *Mitteilungen an den Adel* (Zürich, 1991).

1945, and with it, the family's loss of any political power, the leading members of the family made use of the entire spectrum of history management techniques in order to protect and foster the Hohenzollern reputation. They heavily restricted access to their family archive and filed lawsuits against critical voices that might challenge their carefully curated reputation; they repeatedly engaged in the production of autobiographies, articles and booklets to promote their interpretation of the family's recent history; and they constantly supplied the yellow press with powerful images and heart-warming home stories in an effort to portray the family's continuous celebrity status.

The expropriation of the vast majority of their assets after the Second World War, as well as the establishment of two separate German republics, not only forced the family to become acquainted with a rather bourgeois lifestyle, but also destroyed any remaining hope of a restoration. Yet, the Hohenzollern never contemplated the idea of withdrawing into a strictly private life. On the contrary, they did everything in their power to defend their own interpretation of the family's role in recent history, and to remain visible in the public eye, just in case Germany's desire for a monarchy might one day rekindle. In the early 1950s, Crown Princess Cecilie as well as her son, Prince Louis Ferdinand, who had succeeded his father, Crown Prince Wilhelm, as head of the house in 1951, published lengthy autobiographies.

Cecilie's memoirs were a collection of shallow anecdotes about her life with Crown Prince Wilhelm. She eulogised the crown prince's immaculate character, his undying comradeship, enormous dedication to technical and

social progress, as well as his jaunty nature.³ She fantasised about their glamorous life in the pre-war era, and about their magical wedding, lavish dinner parties and numerous state visits to India, Vienna, London and Cairo.⁴ In sharp contrast to this endless string of joyful anecdotes, Cecilie almost entirely refrains from commenting on the momentous implications of the Third Reich. On the few occasions she does, she is eager to point out that the crown prince not only never played an active political role in the Third Reich, but also, that he had been opposed to the regime.⁵ Overall, these memoirs serve as a classic example of selective noble remembrance literature. The pre-war era is remarkably transfigured, the Nazi era studiously ignored, and the post-war period is portrayed as an era of unjustified suffering.

Louis Ferdinand's autobiography is subtler than that of his mother, Cecilie, and not as much of a transfiguration of reality. It is a rather balanced account of his early life, which was dominated by extended periods abroad. He spent years in South America, as well as some time working for Henry Ford in Detroit. In credible fashion, he also accounts for his distant attitude towards the Nazi regime, which culminated in loose contacts to the military resistance. At the same time, Louis Ferdinand also subtly worked on the reputation of his father and grandfather. By means of lengthy vignettes of his personal experiences with both of them, he tries to detach the focus from their political endeavours and portray them as loving and caring fathers who

³ Cecilie von Preussen, *Erinnerungen an den deutschen Kronprinzen* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 107–108.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 33–53.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 107, 108.

were predominantly concerned with the wellbeing of their family and people. He praises his father's jovial and endearing nature, which allowed him to "conquer the hearts of the people by storm".⁶ He depicts his grandfather as a devout, steadfast character who "endured his destiny with exemplary dignity, wisdom and serenity".⁷ Thereby, he not only creates empathy for the Kaiser and the crown prince, but also contributes to a "humanisation" of these historic figures. The widely held image of the warmongering Kaiser and his dashing radical right-wing son are here replaced with an image of dedicated, caring and indulgent private citizens.

Only a few years later, Duchess Viktoria-Luise of Brunswick, the Kaiser's only daughter, joined her nephew and sister-in-law in the defence of the family's legacy. In her lengthy autobiography, *The Kaiser's Daughter: The Memoirs of HRH Princess Viktoria Luise*, she came to the rescue of her ill-reputed father. "Nobody," she tells her audience, "could escape the spontaneous kindness of his nature." She rhapsodises about the "Kaiser's veracity and candour, his pristine character, as well as his humanity and chivalry".⁸ She depicts the Kaiser as a man of progress who, "unlike most of his contemporaries, had grasped the magnitude of transition" that Germany had been exposed to at the turn of the century, and paints the image of a prudent and peace-loving monarch who tried everything in his power to prevent the First World War.⁹ In the end, as one of the chapter headings

⁶ Louis Ferdinand Prinz von Preussen, *Im Strom der Geschichte* (Munich, 1993), p. 32.

⁷ Ibid, p. 206.

⁸ Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Ein Leben als Tochter des Kaisers* (Hanover, 1966), p. 198.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 126, 134.

insinuates, the Kaiser foundered due to the “envy of the gods”. She also rigorously defends her father against the accusation that the Kaiser had abandoned his people in 1918 and fled into exile. According to her, the entire abdication had been an intrigue of Hindenburg and the General Chief of Staff who had sacrificed Wilhelm II in order to achieve better peace terms. The Kaiser, she notes, “wanted to pull his troops together and march for Berlin”.¹⁰

These eulogies on the family’s recent past reached a substantial audience. Within one year, more than 100,000 copies of Viktoria-Luise’s memoirs were sold.¹¹ This enormous success inspired the Duchess to produce another six anecdotal treatises over the next ten years.¹² Louis Ferdinand’s autobiography also saw numerous reprints over the years. Both works were also translated into English and published abroad.¹³ The royal authors did everything in their power to increase the circulation of their memoirs. Louis Ferdinand hosted several “publication-parties” and presented his work to interested readers. Viktoria-Luise went on various promotional tours throughout Germany, personally signing thousands of copies.¹⁴ Furthermore,

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 206.

¹¹ See: Tante vorn, *SPIEGEL*, 16.12.1968.

¹² Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Im Glanz der Krone* (Hanover, 1966); Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Bilder der Kaiserzeit* (Hanover, 1969); Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Vor 100 Jahren* (Hanover, 1970); Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Deutschlands letzte Kaiserin* (Hanover, 1971); Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Im Strom der Zeit* (Hanover, 1974); Herzogin Viktoria Luise von Braunschweig, *Die Kronprinzessin* (Hanover, 1977).

¹³ Robert Vacha (ed.), *The Kaiser’s Daughter – Memoirs of H.R.H. Viktoria Luise, Duchess of Brunswick and Lüneburg, Princess of Prussia* (London, 1977); Louis Ferdinand, Prince of Prussia, *The Rebel Prince* (Chicago, 1952).

¹⁴ Tante vorn, *SPIEGEL*, 16.12.1968.

the Hohenzollern family quickly grasped the importance of the mass media. Prior to full publication, all the royal authors published excerpts of their works in large German magazines. This procedure not only significantly increased the outreach of their rather one-sided encomia, but also had the welcome side effect of supplementing the rather meagre revenues of the former ruling family.¹⁵

In the 1980s, further members of the house felt obliged to interpret the family's entanglement in the history of the twentieth century. In 1985, Friedrich Wilhelm, the eldest son of Louis Ferdinand, published a very benevolent interpretation of his family's role in the interwar period.¹⁶ Although significantly more scholarly and critical in its approach than the previous autobiographies, this work was "an expression of piety rather than a relentless confrontation with the often inconvenient truth".¹⁷ Instead of illuminating the myriad of connections between his family and Nazi dignitaries, the princely author uses the well-established technique of sacrificing one family member to save the rest. He portrayed August Wilhelm, a son of the Kaiser and high-ranking SA-General, as a misguided character and isolated figure within an otherwise fairly Nazi-critical family. Any possible culpability is thereby offloaded onto the alleged outsider in an effort to preserve the larger narrative that the Hohenzollern, as a whole, kept their distance from National Socialism.

¹⁵ See: Einer hat Geld gebraucht, *SPIEGEL*, 07.04.1954.

¹⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Prinz von Preussen, *Das Haus Hohenzollern 1918–1945* (Munich, 1985).

¹⁷ John C. G. Röhl, Review of: Willibald Gutsche, *Ein Kaiser im Exil* (Marburg, 1991), in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, 258, No. 2 (1994), pp. 546–548.

Wilhelm-Karl, another grandson of the Kaiser, also actively helped to construct a more favourable perception of his grandfather's legacy. In an extended essay entitled *Memories of my Imperial Grandfather*, he styles the Kaiser as "the most important monarch" of his time and emphasised his deep commitment to scientific progress, religious tolerance and political reforms. At the same time, he refuses to ascribe to his grandfather significant responsibility for the downfall of the empire: "It is unhistorical and unfair to encumber one man with the burdens and failures of an entire era".¹⁸ Wilhelm-Karl also came to the rescue of the Kaiser when the historian John C. G. Röhl published his first study of Wilhelm's reign.¹⁹ In a large newspaper article in *Die Zeit* Wilhelm-Karl determinedly rejected Röhl's "abhorrent accusations" that the Kaiser had substantially been responsible for the outbreak of the First World War. Once again, he reiterated his glorifying theses of his previous essay and reproached Röhl for painting an utterly "distorted image" of the Kaiser.²⁰

Besides meticulously restoring the reputation of their forebears, the Hohenzollern also went to great lengths to defend their role as Germany's primary aristocratic family and remain in the public spotlight. As something of a royal family in-waiting, the Hohenzollern had to fulfil a wide spectrum of representative tasks in order to justify their distant hopes for restoration. As early as 1952, Louis Ferdinand and his wife, Kira, founded the Prinzessin Kira von Preußen foundation, designed to support displaced children. Every

¹⁸ Wilhelm-Karl Prinz von Preussen, *Erinnerungen an meinen kaiserlichen Großvater*, in: *Wilhelminische Studien*, 3 (2004), p. 20.

¹⁹ John C. G. Röhl, *Kaiser, Hof und Staat: Wilhelm II. und die deutsche Politik* (Munich, 1987).

²⁰ Er führte kein Operettenregiment, *Die Zeit*, 13.05.1988.

year, the couple organized a gala concert to raise funds, and subsequently hosted hundreds of children for an extended summer break on Hohenzollern Castle in Hechingen.²¹ Numerous other princes and princesses were involved in charitable organisations over the years. Prince Oskar, as well as his son and grandson, presided over the German branch of the Order of St. John. Prince Friedrich-Wilhelm headed the foundation Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis Kirche. Prince Georg Friedrich is a member of the board of trustees of the Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz.

The family knew how to satisfy the public's desire for powerful images. When Louis Ferdinand's daughter, Marie-Cecilie, married the Duke of Oldenburg in 1965, the wedding was meticulously exploited to cement the family's celebrity status. On the day before the ceremony, in the newly restored Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, the parents of the bride, together with the bridal couple, staged a press conference to which more than 250 journalists were invited. A camera team filmed the entire wedding and a publishing house paid the alleged sum of 100,000 Deutschmarks for the exclusive rights to the official wedding photo.²² A similar spectacle was staged ten years later when Louis Ferdinand's future successor, Prince Louis Ferdinand Jr., married Countess Donata zu Castell-Rüdenhausen.²³ There followed a drip-feed of less spectacular stories. In the tabloid *Quick*, we see Louis Ferdinand hosting flabbergasted journalists who could not believe that

²¹ See: Die Geschichte der Prinzessin Kira von Preussen Stiftung, online at: https://www.preussen.de/de/familie/prinzessin_kira_stiftung/geschichte_der_stiftung.html.

²² Unsere Antwort auf die Rolling Stones, *Die Zeit*, 10.12.1965.

²³ See: Hochzeit von Prinz Louis Ferdinand (jr.) im Mai 1975, YouTube video, 3:16, posted by: "royalisttoday", 24.08.2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwsrGoynw4U>.

the prince personally regaled them with food and drinks. “By doing so he does not forfeit an inch of his dignity and transcendence,” the magazine concluded.²⁴ In the magazine *Bunte*, Louis Ferdinand initiates readers into his private life as a family patriarch.²⁵ His son, Louis Ferdinand Jr., shows the press around the family estate in Bremen and almost every anniversary or engagement was widely covered in the yellow press.²⁶

The driving idea behind these efforts, both to shape the interpretation of the family’s role in the formative events of the twentieth century and to win the sympathy of a broad public, was the hope – however distant – of a monarchical restoration. The Hohenzollern were fully aware of the fact that a return to the throne could not be achieved by means of a solely political process, but had to be closely supported by an overwhelming public desire for the reestablishment of a parliamentary monarchy. Over the years, Louis Ferdinand had reiterated this awareness in numerous interviews. “If the majority of the German people,” he proclaimed, “would ask me to take over I would not elude responsibility.”²⁷

When a redraft of the German constitution was widely discussed in the wake of German reunification in the autumn of 1990, these distant hopes received

²⁴ Unverzichtbare Kaiserkrone, *SPIEGEL*, 18.11.1968.

²⁵ Tina Rohowski, *Das Private in der Politik: Politiker-Homestories in der deutschen Unterhaltungspresse* (Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 75.

²⁶ See the vast collection of images in the archive of Getty Images. Online at: <http://www.gettyimages.com.au/photos/louis-ferdinand-prince?excludenudity=true&mediatype=photography&phrase=louis%20ferdinand%20prince&sort=mostpopular>.

²⁷ Frank Lothar Kroll, *Geschichtswissenschaft in politischer Absicht: Hans-Joachim Schoeps und Preußen* (Berlin, 2010), p. 64; See also: Zeugen des Jahrhunderts, Prinz Louis Ferdinand von Preußen im Gespräch mit Friedrich Müller, ZDF, 1986.

new impetus. As if to remind the newly reunified nation of its glorious past under the rule of the Hohenzollern, Louis Ferdinand carefully staged the family's symbolic return to Brandenburg. The centrepieces of this homecoming were two simple coffins, which contained the mortal remains of two of Prussia's greatest kings. At the end of the Second World War, when the Red Army stood at the gates of Berlin, the coffins of Frederick Wilhelm I and his son Frederick II, had been evacuated from Potsdam to a potash mine in Eichsfeld. American soldiers retrieved them and brought them to Marburg, from where they were ultimately transferred to Hohenzollern Castle in Hechingen in 1952.²⁸ There they remained until the summer of 1991. On 17 August, exactly 205 years after the death of Frederick II, his coffin was retrieved from the family crypt in Hechingen and loaded on a special historic train. Escorted by a guard of honour of the German army, the coffin arrived in Potsdam where it was received by the music corps of the First Hanoverian Panzer Division. Thousands of spectators lined the streets and followed the coffin from the train station to the park of Sanssouci Castle.²⁹ In the shadow of Prussia's most celebrated king, Louis Ferdinand tried to offer the reunited nation a constitutional alternative loaded with glamour and tradition.

The meticulously orchestrated ceremony, however, aroused considerable criticism in the press. Historians like Hans Mommsen criticised the event as a "constructed preservation of tradition" (*aufgesetzte Traditionspflege*) from

²⁸ Henning Köhler, *Helmut Kohl – Ein Leben für die Politik* (Cologne, 2014), p. 763.

²⁹ Gegen den letzten Willen – Die Heimkehr der Preußenkönige nach Sanssouci, *Die Zeit*, 23.08.1991.

which an “awry nationalism” (*verquerrer Nationalismus*) might emerge.³⁰ Pointing to the participation of Chancellor Kohl, Sebastian Haffner even feared a second “Day of Potsdam”, reminding his readers of 21 March 1933 when Goebbels and Hitler tried to fuse the new National Socialist Germany with the prestige of the old Prussia.³¹ Those fears, however, were entirely unfounded. More than seventy years after the Kaiser’s abdication, neither the Bundestag nor the public seriously thought about recalling the Hohenzollern. A new constitution was never drafted. Instead, the former GDR was simply incorporated into the Federal Republic and President Richard von Weizsäcker remained head of state.

The Restitution Process after German Reunification

Reunification did not usher in a restoration of the monarchy, but it did have enormous consequences for the Hohenzollern in a different respect. The vast majority of the family’s pre-war possessions had been situated east of the river Elbe. Roughly two thirds of these properties were located in the areas relinquished to Poland and Russia in the summer of 1945. The remaining third, however, lay in the former German Democratic Republic.³² This meant that a host of former assets and landed properties were once again within reach. Yet, what originally seemed a purely legal issue soon turned into a struggle for the prerogative of interpretation of the Hohenzollern’s family history.

³⁰ Aktion Sarg und Asche, *SPIEGEL*, 12.08.1991.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wenn ich Kaiser wär, *SPIEGEL*, 10.04.1957.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the German legislature refused to return properties that had been expropriated by the Soviet Occupational Administration between 1945 and 1949. On the one hand, the government needed these assets to offset, if only partially, the extreme cost of reunification. On the other hand, it feared possible upheavals if it were to drastically alter the social post-war settlements in the former German Democratic Republic.³³ As consequence, the government decided to pay a nominal compensation to former landowners and allowed them to buy land at a discounted price. The Hohenzollern, however, were unwilling to accept this provision and filed a lawsuit at the administrative court in Potsdam.³⁴ Unsurprisingly, the court quashed this claim in 1999, referring to the “crystal-clear legal situation”.³⁵ The Hohenzollern responded by requesting compensation under the terms of the 1994 compensation law. The resulting proceeding dragged on for almost one and a half decades. The duration of the case was partly owed to the enormous number of claims filed after reunification. Thousands of applicants tried to attain compensation for properties expropriated after the war. Every day the post officers delivered “washing baskets full of documents” to the relevant government agencies.³⁶ In Brandenburg alone, more than 250,000 applications for more than 638,000

³³ See the section *The Problem of Restitution* in chapter V of this thesis.

³⁴ Numerous other former landowners also filed lawsuits. See exemplary: BVerfG, Beschluss des Zweiten Senats vom 26. Oktober 2004 – 2 BvR 955/00 – Rn. (1-160), online at: www.bverfg.de/e/rs20041026_2bvr095500.html; European Court of Human Rights, Inadmissibility Decision von Maltzan and others, von Zitzewitz and others and MAN Ferrostaal and Alfred Töpfer Stiftung v. Germany, Press release 30.03.2005, online at: hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-1304294-1360416.

³⁵ Der Adel soll jetzt Geld zurückbekommen, *Tagesspiegel*, 25.02.2014.

³⁶ Amt für offene Vermögensfragen wird aufgelöst, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29.12.2015.

properties were submitted.³⁷ The other reason for the lengthiness of the proceedings was the complexity of the Hohenzollern case. The family laid claim to sixty-four castles, villas and estates in Brandenburg, among them such illustrious properties as Rheinsberg Castle, Krongut Bornstedt, Villa Liegnitz, Villa Ingelheim, Villa Quandt and Lindstedt Castle. Under the terms of the law, an expropriated family was eligible for a five per cent compensation of the original value of the property at the time of expropriation in 1945. In the case of the Hohenzollern, the combined property value eventually amounted to 42.7 million Deutschmark. This equated to a compensation fee of roughly 1.2 million euros.³⁸ Since all these claims had to be reviewed and assessed individually, it was not until 2010 that the process finally picked up pace.

It might appear, at first glance, as if the legal struggle between the Hohenzollern and the German state over the right to inherit real estate and other properties expropriated by the Soviet occupation authorities and the communist regime after 1945 should fall outside the remit of a study of nobiliary history management. Firstly, the adjudication of restitution cases is a product of legal, rather than historical, deliberation. And second, the process of achieving decisions in this area is usually conducted behind closed doors, in courts and government offices; it thus lacks the dimension of public

³⁷ Statistiken zu offenen Vermögensfragen ab 1992, online at: <http://www.badv.bund.de/DE/OffeneVermögensfragen/Statistik/start.html;jsessionid=4ED3C18191E7E507A2B8F544FCCF3D0B.intranet1>; Personal correspondence with Reinhard Bodenstab of the Ministry of Finance Brandenburg.

³⁸ Ein 23 Jahre alter Antrag, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 25.02.2014; Keine Steuermillion für Hohenzollern, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 15.01.2016; Schlösser in Brandenburg: Kein Geld für die Hohenzollern, *Tagesspiegel*, 14.01.2016.

resonance and memory that is crucial to the kind of history management explored in this thesis. If I include a discussion here, this is for two reasons. The first is that the 1994 law established a nexus between historical interpretation and legal decision-finding that was highly unusual in the context of German and European law. The compensation law included an important restriction, which implied that compensation could not be granted if the beneficiary or his heirs could be showed to have provided the National Socialist system with “substantial assistance”. In 2010, the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues (Landesamt für offene Vermögensfragen) signalled to Georg Friedrich Prince of Prussia, who by then, had inherited the claims from his grandfather, Louis Ferdinand, that there might be an issue with the assessment of Crown Prince Wilhelm’s demeanour during the Third Reich, and asked the family to provide exculpatory evidence.³⁹ The campaign for restitution thus became *nolens volens* intertwined with the question of how the family’s political behaviour during the gravest crisis of the twentieth century should be interpreted. And this, in turn, was a question for historians, not lawyers. The second reason is that although the process was supposed to be confidential, the high visibility and status of the former ruling family made this impossible. The question of whether the Hohenzollern family would be compensated for the expropriations, and to what extent, became a public scandal.

³⁹ Dr. Eckart Putzier, Vermerk, Berlin, 10.02.2011, p. 2. Unpublished memorandum of the lawyer of the Hohenzollern family. Hausarchiv des vormals regierenden preußischen Königshauses (Berlin).

The restitution issue endowed the history management of the Hohenzollern family with a new dimension. Whereas their main concern hitherto had been to rebuild their reputation in order to consolidate their status as the primary German noble family and heirs to a vacant German throne, the request from the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues established a nexus between history management and economic interest. The armature of history management was now mobilised to secure not only symbolic, but also real, capital.

The Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues did not contest the role of the original claimant, Louis Ferdinand Prince of Prussia, in the Third Reich. He had spent most of the 1930s abroad, and thereafter, had been closely associated with the military resistance against Hitler. Yet, at the time of expropriation in 1945, the family's assets had been in the possession of Crown Prince Wilhelm, Louis Ferdinand's father. His involvement in the Third Reich left room for interpretation. Consequently, as part of their efforts to refute the accusations against the crown prince, the Hohenzollern commissioned an external historian, Professor Christopher Clark from Cambridge University, to evaluate the contested points. The choice of a foreign historian might be surprising at first, but the German media environment was prone to polarisation around issues like this. Like fox hunting in Britain, the question of restitution in a high-profile case like this was likely to serve as lightning rod for political antagonisms and symbolise broader ideological commitments and attitudes. To some extent, the historical profession, too, was organized in large ideological camps affiliated with the dominant political parties. The Bielefeld School, as we have already

seen, was likely to take a very hostile view of the historical role played by the Hohenzollern and, in such a divided landscape, even a more sympathetic response might be open to the charge of partisanship. The choice of a foreign historian was thus attractive, and Clark was known for a study of the last Kaiser, Wilhelm II, which, while critical of his comportment in office, had striven to achieve a balanced assessment of his political impact.

Did the Crown Prince Provide the National Socialist Movement with Substantial Assistance?

Appraisal Professor Christopher Clark

The Hohenzollern granted Clark access to their family archive and asked him briefly to address four distinct but interconnected problems. The first related to the actions taken by Crown Prince Wilhelm vis-à-vis the National Socialist movement. The main question was whether these actions “were designed to improve the conditions for the establishment, the development or the extension of the National Socialist system or to suppress resistance against this system”, and if “these actions actually had this effect”. The second question revolved around the issue of whether the crown prince undertook “such actions only occasionally or incidentally, or [...] with a degree of consistency”. The third question related to what benefit the National Socialist regime drew from the crown prince’s actions. The fourth question concerned the prince’s own intentions: “Did Crown Prince Wilhelm act on the

presumption that his behaviour could result in a significant benefit for the National Socialist regime?"⁴⁰

To illuminate these points, Clark examined a sequence of key events that had been specifically contested by the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues. He did this by means of a chronological case-by-case discussion. The first contested point was a statement by the crown prince, published by the *Telegraphen-Union* on 3 April 1932, in which the prince declared his support for Adolf Hitler and encouraged his readers to vote for Adolf Hitler in the final ballot of the presidential election on 10 April 1932. "Since I consider a closed national front absolutely necessary, I shall vote for Adolf Hitler in the second election."⁴¹ Although this letter of support was without a doubt intended to bolster the National Socialist campaign, Clark argued, there was no evidence whatsoever that this recommendation had any substantial effects on the voting behaviour of the German people. There were no signs in the press that anybody believed Hitler's electoral success was even in small degree owed to the crown prince's intervention. Clark pointed out that the crown prince's popularity had been extremely diminished by his flight to Holland in 1918. Even in royalist circles, he noted, the prince "was viewed with scepticism" and monarchism was no longer exclusively focused on the persons of the exiled Kaiser or his temporarily exiled son, who had only returned to Germany in 1923.⁴² Already during the war, Paul von

⁴⁰ Professor Sir Christopher Clark, *Did Crown Prince Wilhelm provide the National Socialist system with substantial assistance?* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 2.

⁴¹ See: Klaus Jonas, *The life of Crown Prince Wilhelm* (London, 1961), p. 177; Paul Herre, *Kronprinz Wilhelm – Seine Rolle in der deutschen Politik* (Munich, 1954), p. 209.

⁴² Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 8.

Hindenburg had substantially usurped the public role of the Kaiser, taking on the function of an “*Ersatzkaiser*”, and among conservative circles in the Reich, he retained this status as *Reichspräsident*. Clark agreed with the historian Lothar Machtan, author of a fine study of another of the Kaiser’s sons, that the crown prince was not a “moving force” capable of swaying the public, but a mere “parade-horse”.⁴³

The second point addressed by the appraisal is a letter Crown Prince Wilhelm wrote to the minister of defence (*Reichswehrminister*), Wilhelm Groener, in April 1932.⁴⁴ Therein, the crown prince emphatically demanded that Groener revoke a ban on paramilitary organisations such as the SA. According to the crown prince, such formations represented “valuable human potential” (*wunderbares Menschenmaterial*), which would be vitally needed to defend Germany’s borders in the east. Especially referring to the absence of universal military service in Germany at the time, the crown prince was worried that in case of a war, the Reichswehr might instead have to rely on “similar formations on the left” which could exploit this situation to commit “acts of sabotage”.⁴⁵ This document raised issues of a different order, in the sense that it related not to the impact of a public utterance on the political choices of unspecified groups of people, but rather to an effort to intervene in politics. Clark emphasised the reactionary orientation of the letter, but expressed scepticism about its impact on the recipient. Dogged by failing health and troubled by political intrigues of General Kurt von

⁴³ Machtan, *Der Kaisersohn bei Hitler*, pp. 242–244.

⁴⁴ Printed in: Friedrich Wilhelm Prinz von Preußen, *Das Haus Hohenzollern 1918–1945* (Munich, 1985), p. 204.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Schleicher and his circle, Groener resigned in May 1932, without having shown any sign of revoking the ban on paramilitary organisations. In fact, the ban remained in place until after the resignation of Reich Chancellor Brüning in June 1932. It was subsequently rescinded by the newly appointed Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen. Neither in the collapse of the government, nor in von Papen's decision to lift the ban, Clark argued, did the crown prince play any appreciable part.⁴⁶

Another critical point raised by the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues was a letter Crown Prince Wilhelm wrote to Adolf Hitler on 25 September 1932. In it, the crown prince criticised Hitler for driving his party into "a position of ever-sharper opposition and popular sedition", but also attempted to coax Hitler into accepting a role in government – even if it were not the chancellorship – and adopting a more flexible approach, so as to bring "his wonderful movement out of opposition".⁴⁷ Yet, even this direct intervention of the crown prince, Clark argued, remained entirely unsuccessful, as the reply of Hitler three days later made clear. Hitler made no concessions whatsoever to the prince's standpoint; he refused flat out to accept a subordinate position or to join any sort of coalition.⁴⁸ The prince's appeal should be read as yet another articulation of what Karl Jaspers had once called the *Zähmungskonzept*; the deluded notion widely entertained in conservative and reactionary circles that the right would be immeasurably

⁴⁶ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Letter Crown Prince Wilhelm to Adolf Hitler, Berlin, 25.09.1932, GStA, BPH, Rep. 54 Nr. 137-1.

⁴⁸ Letter Adolf Hitler to Crown Prince Wilhelm, Munich, 28.09.1932, GStA, BPH, Rep. 54 Nr. 137-2.

strengthened if Hitler could incorporate into a coalition that would be in a position to make use of the popular appeal of the NSDAP, while keeping Hitler under political control. As so often, Clark pointed out, the crown prince had gravely overestimated his political influence and his efforts once more bore no fruit.⁴⁹

Clark gave focused special attention to the impact of the crown prince's behaviour during the state ceremony known as the 'Day of Potsdam' on 21 March 1933. The prince's presence at this event raised a third issue, namely, whether he had performed, in a symbolic capacity, a crucial regime-consolidating role. He had not been officially invited to Potsdam and his father, Kaiser Wilhelm II, had urged him not to attend.⁵⁰ But he turned up at Potsdam's Garrison Church nonetheless and took up a prominent position behind the empty throne inside the church. Unlike his brother, August Wilhelm, who wore the uniform of a SA-General, the crown prince was dressed in the uniform of the Death's Head Hussars (*Totenkopf-Husaren*), a regiment he had commanded before the First World War.⁵¹ In his assessment of the choreography of the event, Clark once more pointed to the marginal importance of the crown prince in the proceedings. He argued that the attention of the public and the semiotic weight of the ceremony were focused on Reich President Paul von Hindenburg rather than on the crown prince. Not only did the hoary Field Marshall embody the traditions and glory of the

⁴⁹ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Sigurd von Ilse, *Der Kaiser in Holland – Monarchie und Nationalsozialismus 1924–1941* (Munich, 1968), p. 215.

⁵¹ For a detailed description of the 'Day of Potsdam' see: John Zimmermann, *Der Tag von Potsdam*, in: Michael Epkenhans and Carmen Winkel (eds), *Die Garnisonkirche Potsdam. Zwischen Mythos und Erinnerung* (Freiburg, 2013), pp. 69–90.

old Prussia, but he was also the man in power. The photographs widely circulated in the press in the following days centred on Hindenburg and Hitler; the crown prince was largely ignored.⁵² In the long article covering the event in the NSDAP party daily *Völkische Beobachter*, Crown Prince Wilhelm was merely mentioned as having been present.⁵³ As for the crown prince's intentions in participating in the Day of Potsdam, an event meticulously orchestrated by Goebbels with the clear purpose of anchoring the new Nazi movement in the splendour of the old Prussia, this reflected the crown prince's deluded belief that the Nazis might yet reinstate him as emperor of Germany. Another private factor was the crown prince's jealousy of his much more popular younger brother, August Wilhelm, who, as Lothar Machtan put it, "appeared to be well on his way to usurping the hereditary rank of crown prince by means of a Nazi political career".⁵⁴

Among the other interventions that had come under critical scrutiny were a few articles the crown prince had published in the domestic and foreign press. On 10 November 1933, in a piece called *Novembertage*, the crown prince praised Hitler's successful efforts in defeating the radical left.⁵⁵ Germany, the prince argued, was deeply indebted to its Führer and ought to settle its account with its leader by supporting Hitler in the upcoming plebiscite on Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. While there could be no doubting the generally supportive orientation of the article,

⁵² Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 9.

⁵³ *Völkische Beobachter* 22.03.1933, cited in: Friedrich Wilhelm Prinz von Preußen, *Das Haus Hohenzollern*, pp. 206–207.

⁵⁴ Machtan, *Der Kaisersohn bei Hitler*, p. 272.

⁵⁵ Crown Prince Wilhelm, *Novembertage*, Berlin, 10.11.1933, GStA, I. HA Rep. 100 A Nr. 388/2.

Clark argued, there was no reason to suspect that its effect had been anything but minimal. Firstly, Hitler's popularity had reached unprecedented heights by the end of 1933, thanks to the first signs of economic recovery. Secondly, the plebiscite had also been supported by far more influential players than the crown prince, such as Reich President von Hindenburg, as well as economic and church leaders. Ballot manipulation was a further factor in the government's success. Consequently, Clark concluded, "the importance of the crown prince's intervention would appear to be negligible".⁵⁶

Much the same could be said, Clark argued, of two further published statements by the crown prince. In an article called *Ewiges Preußentum* in early January 1934, the crown prince celebrated the Prussian tradition of "conservative wisdom of state" and stressed that Prussia had repeatedly reinvented itself in a series of revolutions from above. In Hitler, the crown prince saw the best guarantee that this "bold and wise spirit of eternal Prussian legacy" would continue.⁵⁷ But the article was more a transfiguration of Prussia; its support for National Socialism was limited and conditional; this was a "very sotto voce intervention whose impact is unlikely to have been significant".⁵⁸ At the same time, the crown prince seems to have published his only article in the British press.⁵⁹ In it, he stated that Hitler had

⁵⁶ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Crown Prince Wilhelm, *Ewiges Preußentum*, Berlin, 01.1934, GStA, I. HA Rep. 100 A Nr. 388/2.

⁵⁸ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 10.

⁵⁹ A handwritten note on the surviving transcript of this article mentions the "London International Press Ltd." as the source of publication. If and which newspapers actually published this article, however, is unfortunately not retraceable. Major newspapers such as

saved Germany from Bolshevism and tried to reassure the British people that “the German people are far from assuming an aggressive attitude to their neighbours”.⁶⁰ In the case of this article, the chief concern related to whether the prince had played an important role in consolidating the new regime’s international position. But here, the impact of the prince’s intervention appeared to be minimal – no major newspapers picked up the story.⁶¹

As to the question of whether the services rendered by the crown prince were sustained with any degree of “consistency”, Clark was sceptical as well. Although Crown Prince Wilhelm was involved in various attempts to convince Hitler and the NSDAP to enter into a coalition of national forces, “these interventions were sporadic and driven in the main by self-interest”.⁶² Once the crown prince realised that the Nazis were not at all interested in restoring him as emperor of Germany, “his interest in serving the regime largely evaporated”.⁶³ It was a notable fact that the crown prince (unlike his brothers) never joined the NSDAP. He did for a brief period become a member of the National Socialist Motorists’ Corps (NSKK), after the Stahlhelm (which the crown prince was affiliated with) had been incorporated into the SA. After a quarrel with his commanding officer, the crown prince, however, left this organisation in 1936.⁶⁴ To be sure, the crown

The Times, the Manchester Guardian or the Daily Telegraph did neither publish nor comment on it. See: Crown Prince Wilhelm, London International Press Ltd. On 12.12.1933, GStA, I. HA, Rep. 100 A, Nr. 388/2.

⁶⁰ Crown Prince Wilhelm, London International Press Ltd. On 12.12.1933, GStA, I. HA, Rep. 100 A, Nr. 388/2.

⁶¹ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 13.

⁶² Ibid, p. 11.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Jonas, *The Life of Crown Prince William*, pp. 191–192.

prince had sent birthday telegrams on Hitler's and Goering's birthdays and had wired Hitler to congratulate him on his victorious campaigns against Czechoslovakia and France. "These communications doubtless expressed an authentic enthusiasm for the exploits of the regime," Clark acknowledged, but could not be interpreted as "continuing service to the regime or even a consistent activism in its support."⁶⁵ These telegrams might also have been driven by the looming threat of expropriation, Clark suggested, referring to a letter of Crown Prince Wilhelm to Hermann Goering in which the prince begged Hitler's *Reichsmarschall* to prevent a partial expropriation of Hohenzollern land in Silesia.⁶⁶

With regard to the intentions of Crown Prince Wilhelm, the appraisal concluded that the crown prince was a person of reactionary temperament who favoured a hard policy against the left, even if this involved the deployment of violence and other extra-constitutional means, and favoured a policy directed towards absorbing the National Socialist movement into a broad right-wing coalition. He had no principled objection to the NSDAP. But his behaviour had not been oriented to the consistent support of the party either before, during or after the seizure of power. Rather, "the crown prince acted above all on the presumption that his behaviour could result in a significant benefit to himself."⁶⁷ His paramount goal was the restoration of a Hohenzollern monarchy with himself on the throne. To the crown prince, National Socialism was a means to an end. Clark's main line of argument is

⁶⁵ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁶ Letter Crown Prince Wilhelm to Hermann Goering, Potsdam 29 June 1939, BA, R43/4063, Fiche 3, fo. 99–101.

⁶⁷ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 14.

thus based on the contention that the crown prince “was a marginal figure in the politics of the late Weimar Republic and in the early phase of the regime’s consolidation of power”.⁶⁸ Clark observed that Crown Prince Wilhelm “did on a few occasions act on the presumption that his behaviour could result in significant benefit for the National Socialist regime”, but argued that due to his political irrelevance and “incapacity to act effectually in a complex and fast evolving political environment”, his actions had neither substantial impact on the establishment nor the stabilisation of the National Socialist system.⁶⁹ It followed that the Crown Prince Wilhelm had provided the regime with intermittent support, but that he had not provided the National Socialist regime with *substantial* or consistent assistance.

In the summer of 2011, the Hohenzollern submitted Clark’s appraisal. After further years of research in the archives and discrete negotiations, the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues signalled its approval of compensation in December 2013. Its preliminary decision agreed in large parts with the argumentation of the external appraisal and concluded that Crown Prince Wilhelm had not “substantially assisted” the National Socialist movement. Consequently, his heirs would be eligible for compensation under the terms of the 1994 compensation law (*Ausgleichsleistungsgesetz*).⁷⁰ The final decision, normally a formality, lay with Brandenburg’s ministry of finance.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bescheidsentwurf bzgl. Ansprüche SKH Herrn Georg Friedrich Prinz von Preußen auf im heutigen Bundesland Brandenburg gelegene Immobilien, Landkreis Oder-Spree, Amt zur Regelung offener Vermögensfragen, 18.12.2013, Hausarchiv des vormals regierenden preußischen Königshauses (Berlin).

In January 2014, however, there was a reshuffle in Brandenburg's cabinet and Christian Görke replaced the long-time minister of finance, Helmuth Markow. Görke, the head of the far-left party DIE LINKE, personally intervened to block the Hohenzollern restitution process. DIE LINKE, as the successor party of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei) took a dim view of any measures likely to place in question – even morally – the post-war expropriations. The party's manifesto still defends the post-war land reform as a necessary tool "to protect the workers from seigniorial exploitation".⁷¹ Görke and his entourage were determined, in particular, to prevent any compensation payments from finding their way into the hands of Germany's former ruling family. Their voters, they feared, would not tolerate financial compensation for the most prominent representative of the traditional class enemy. Overnight, Görke declared the decade-long work of Brandenburg's Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues null and void and rescinded its preliminary decision. Instead, he appointed a further external historian to deliver a counter-appraisal.⁷²

Appraisal Dr Stephan Malinowski

As its expert witness, the ministry of finance of Brandenburg appointed Dr Stephan Malinowski, a lecturer of modern European history at the

⁷¹ Woher wir kommen, wer wir sind, Programm der Partei DIE LINKE, online at: <https://www.die-linke.de/partei/dokumente/programm-der-partei-die-linke/i-woher-wir-kommen-wer-wir-sind/>.

⁷² Entschädigung für Hohenzollern: Görke greift ein, *FOCUS*, 15.03.2014; Hohenzollernzahlung wird geprüft, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25.02.2014; Streit um die Rolle der Hohenzollern, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 05.03.2014.

University of Edinburgh. Malinowski is known for his ground-breaking study of the German nobility's role in the Third Reich in which he emphasised not only a large degree of collaboration between the German nobility and the National Socialist movement, but also a profound congruence of political interests and social values.⁷³ In this study, he also touched upon the Hohenzollern's role in the Third Reich, attributing to the crown prince not only a radical right-wing mentality, but also a distinct willingness to collaborate with the Nazi regime.⁷⁴ Malinowski's critical attitude towards the nobility in general, and the crown prince in particular, thus perfectly qualified him to deliver a counter-appraisal on behalf of Christian Goerke.

Dr Malinowski was supplied with a copy of Clark's early appraisal and provided with a catalogue of eight specific questions. The first two were concerned with the consistency, intentions and impact of the crown prince's support towards National Socialism. The third related to possible memberships of the crown prince in National Socialist organisations. The fourth asked to depict "successful forms of support throughout the year of 1932", whereas the fifth concerned the consequences of Wilhelm's public appearance during the Day of Potsdam. The last three questions related to possible financial contributions to National Socialist organisations, letters to

⁷³ Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 506–509.

Hitler and other NS-functionaries and connections to the military resistance.⁷⁵

Malinowski did not address these questions sequentially, but divided his appraisal into four main sections. First, he dealt with the consistency of Crown Prince Wilhelm's actions vis-à-vis the National Socialist movement. Second, he addressed the crown prince's status and importance within German society. Thereafter, he examined Wilhelm's role in the National Socialist takeover, before concluding with an assessment of his intentions and the impact of his actions.

Consistency of Crown Prince Wilhelm's Actions

After a brief introduction into the current state of research, the appraisal, in bullet point form and partly annotated, lists eighty-five occasions designed to illuminate the crown prince's contact with representatives of the National Socialist movement. This section meticulously registers every letter or telegram the crown prince wrote to Nazi functionaries, every article he published in the national and international press, every effort of the crown prince to intervene on behalf of the National Socialist movement, as well as every public appearance that might be seen as an expression of support for the NSDAP.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Stephan Malinowski, *Gutachten zum politischen Verhalten des ehemaligen Kronprinzen (Wilhelm Prinz von Preußen, 1882–1951)* (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 2.

⁷⁶ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, pp. 8–42.

The aim was to convey the impression of frequent and consistent interaction between the crown prince and the dignitaries of the Third Reich before and after their ascension to power. Like Clark, Malinowski characterised Crown Prince Wilhelm as a typical representative of the arch-reactionary and anti-republican far right of the 1920s, but he added that the prince had sought contact with Hitler and his movement as early as 1926 in an effort to explore the options of merging the nationalistic right wing forces and overthrow the Weimar Republic.⁷⁷ Malinowski interpreted the interventions discussed in Clark's appraisal (recommendation to vote for Hitler in the presidential election, letter to minister of defence Wilhelm Groener, letter to Hitler, Day of Potsdam, articles in the domestic and foreign press) as demonstrating consistent support for the National Socialists, but he also focused on less prominent episodes, such as Wilhelm's regular visits to the home of Viktoria von Dirksen, whose political salon represented one of the key intersections of conservatives and National Socialists in Berlin.⁷⁸ Rumours in the Berlin press in 1930, according to which the crown prince was contemplating entering the NSDAP, are cited as evidence of Wilhelm's proximity to the National Socialist movement.⁷⁹ The same is true for Wilhelm's membership in the *Society for the Study of Fascism* (*Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus*), which was headed by his cousin, Carl Eduard Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.⁸⁰ If considered jointly, Malinowski argued, these instances formed a bigger

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 13; For a more detailed description of Victoria von Dirksen see: d'Almeida, *High Society in the Third Reich*, p. 39.

⁷⁹ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 19.

picture of continuous contact between the crown prince and the National Socialist party.

Additionally, the Malinowski appraisal referred to Goering's participation in the crown prince's fiftieth birthday celebration at Cecilienhof Castle in spring 1932, as well as to Wilhelm's participation in a state funeral for the former head of the SA-Sturm 33 and pardoned murderer, Hans Maikowski, in January 1933.⁸¹ Malinowski also submitted a detailed survey – including a wide array of photographic evidence – of Crown Prince Wilhelm's frequent appearances at military parades of the *Stahlhelm* before and after it was absorbed into the SA, as well as numerous congratulatory telegrams he sent to Goering and Hitler over the years.⁸² The enormous extent of social and political interaction in those years – of which none had ensued under any constraint – Malinowski argued, were unambiguous proof of the crown prince's continuous and uninterrupted support for the regime.

Relevance of Crown Prince Wilhelm

Thereafter, the appraisal addressed the social and political relevance of the crown prince (in an attempt to assess the impact of Wilhelm's actions). Malinowski insisted on the enormous intrinsic importance of the office of the German crown prince. The significance of this position, he claimed, was

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 20, 24; For a more detailed description of Hans Maikowski see: Sven Reichardt, *Vergemeinschaftung durch Gewalt. Das Beispiel des SA-“Mördersturms 33” in Berlin-Charlottenburg zwischen 1928 und 1932*, in: Herbert Diercks (ed.), *Entgrenzte Gewalt. Täterinnen und Täter im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen, 2002), pp. 20–36.

⁸² Malinowski, *Gutachten*, pp. 30–33, 40, 41.

entirely independent of the personal skills of the incumbent. Unlike an ordinary politician, who had to gradually earn his status and build his reputation, the crown prince was born into a position of superiority and prominence, which was almost impossible to forfeit. The actions of the candidate for the most powerful throne of continental Europe, Malinowski argued, would inevitably have significant ramifications and consequently had to be assessed along different lines than those of “an unemployed assistant baker in Oberstdorf”.⁸³

Malinowski also stressed the crown prince’s position at the apex of the German nobility, a formation whose political influence was in decline after the First World War, but whose social influence remained largely intact. Especially the symbols, traditions and charisma of the old ruling class survived the upheavals of the revolutionary years. Combined with the ability to defend tight and powerful networks and maintain access to the corridors of power, the nobility remained a vital factor in the political landscape of the Weimar Republic.⁸⁴ The crown prince, Malinowski claims, epitomised this position of power like no other when he – dressed in his Death Head Hussar uniform – publically paid homage to the new rulers during the Day of Potsdam, and secretly intervened on behalf of the SA in a private letter to *Reichswehrminister* Groener.

Thus, Malinowski argued that despite Wilhelm’s flight to Holland after the First World War and his often critically viewed personal life – factors which

⁸³ Ibid, p. 51.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

certainly diminished his reputation and popularity in royalist circles and beyond – the crown prince still remained, at least on a symbolic level, a highly influential public figure.

The Crown Prince's role in the Nazi Takeover

In his discussion regarding the National Socialist takeover in 1933, Malinowski insisted above all on the paramount importance of backroom diplomacy. The Nazis' ascent to power, he argued, was essentially orchestrated behind the scenes by means of private channels of communication for which acquaintances, recommendations and access to certain milieus were crucial. Crown Prince Wilhelm, though not a power broker of the calibre of von Papen or von Schleicher, had unrestricted access to Weimar's corridors of power, and therefore belonged to the inner circle responsible for lifting Hitler into the Reich Chancellery.⁸⁵

According to Malinowski, the crown prince's role in this endeavour is exemplified in the proceedings surrounding the presidential election of spring 1932. Prior to his recommendation to vote for Hitler in the second ballot, the crown prince had entertained the idea of running for president himself. In that case, he expected Adolf Hitler, Franz Seldte (*Stahlhelm*) and Paul von Hindenburg to withdraw from the race and rally behind him in order to defeat the only remaining candidate, Ernst Thälmann, the head of the German Communist Party (KPD). Thereafter, Wilhelm intended to

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 54, 55.

restore the Hohenzollern monarchy and played with the idea of appointing Hitler as his chancellor. "If I am nominated for the election of Reich President, you [Hitler] shall be my Chancellor."⁸⁶ This scenario, Malinowski argued, not only showed that Wilhelm remained a key player in Weimar politics, but also invalidated the claim that Wilhelm only cooperated with the Nazis in order to regain his throne. Malinowski instead asserted that Wilhelm specifically envisaged a revived monarchy along the Italian model of Mussolini, where the monarchy remained officially in place, but a strong Führer headed the state. Hitler, therefore, was not a tool in the crown prince's grand plans of restoration, he argued, but an essential piece of the puzzle.⁸⁷ Wilhelm's plans of a Führer-monarchy only became obsolete, Malinowsky suggests, because the Kaiser forbade his son to run for president. Nevertheless, the crown prince continued thereafter to endorse Hitler publicly in the hope that Hitler would re-establish him as emperor of Germany, and therefore offered all the symbolic weight his position as crown prince still offered. According to Malinowski, this weight was still significant and Wilhelm's recommendation that the Germans vote for Hitler "caused a great stir".⁸⁸

The appraisal also ascribed special importance to the efforts of the crown prince – thanks to letters to Groener and Hitler in 1932 – to mediate between

⁸⁶ Gerhard Granier (ed.), *Magnus von Levetzow: Seeoffizier, Monarchist und Wegbereiter Hitlers. Lebensweg und ausgewählte Dokumente* (Boppard am Rhein, 1982), p. 174.

⁸⁷ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 17; Malinowski borrowed this observation from Klaus Jonas' biography of the crown prince – Klaus Jonas, *Der Kronprinz Wilhelm* (Frankfurt a. M., 1962), p. 230. Jonas, however, does not provide any source for this statement. The fact that Wilhelm's election recommendation "caused a great stir" seems to be his own assumption.

the National Socialist movement and conservative circles. The diminishing electoral success in the autumn of 1932 especially showed that the NSDAP was unable to win the Chancellery without forming a coalition with other right wing forces. Even in March 1933, the NSDAP, despite large-scale manipulation, had not exceeded 44 per cent of the popular vote. The process of *Gleichschaltung* by which the party established itself as the unchallenged holder had not yet been achieved. Goebbels and Hitler were still desperate to win over the old elites. With this in mind, they staged the Day of Potsdam in an effort to bring about a “marriage between the Prussian past and the National Socialist future”.⁸⁹ The crown prince, as the key representative of the imperial house, Malinowski suggested, was at the centre of this masquerade.⁹⁰ Placed behind a vacant throne, dressed in his imperial uniform of the Death Head Hussars, Wilhelm was staged as the ‘wing commander’ of Goebbels’ meticulously planned fusion of Prussia and Nazism.⁹¹ This staging, Malinowski emphasised, was essential for the success of the Day of Potsdam. The event was not about showcasing a united NS-state, but rather a merger of the Ancien Regime and National Socialism. Instead of large swastika flags, the traditional flag of the empire dominated the streets of Potsdam. The SA marched in line with the army and Hitler and Goebbels appeared in civil attire. Hitler bowed in front of Hindenburg,

⁸⁹ Anna von der Goltz, *Hindenburg. Power, Myth and the Rise of the Nazis* (Oxford, 2009), p. 176.

⁹⁰ Malinowski based this argument on the assumption that the Nazis had in fact invited the crown prince. The statement of the Kaiser’s adjutant Sigurd von Ilseman, that the crown prince had not officially been invited [Sigurd von Ilseman, *Der Kaiser in Holland – Monarchie und Nationalsozialismus 1924–1941* (Munich, 1968), p. 215] is simply rejected by Malinowski as “highly improbable”; See: Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 61.

⁹¹ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 62.

symbolically accepting the junior role in government. Yet, for this spectacle to work, those representatives of the old empire had to participate who were capable of endowing the new leaders with the respectability of the old Prussia; namely Hindenburg, and especially the crown prince, as the representative of the imperial family. According to Malinowski, the crown prince and his brothers, who also attended the ceremony as members of the Stahlhelm (Prince Eitel Friedrich and Prince Oskar) and the SA (Prince August-Wilhelm), vitally contributed to the successful fusion of the old elites and the NS regime, and thereby willingly and decisively fostered the consolidation of National Socialist power.⁹²

Furthermore, the enactment of the Day of Potsdam sent another powerful message to large parts of the nobility and other conservatives who had up until now remained sceptical about National Socialism. It was designed to illustrate that the revolutionary days of violent street riots had irrevocably come to an end. Instead, the National Socialist movement would return to civilised cooperation and unity with the forces of the old empire. For this message to have the desired effect, Malinowski states, the crown prince's involvement was essential.⁹³

Thus, Malinowski claimed, Crown Prince Wilhelm contributed to Hitler's eventual success on two different levels. On the one hand, he interceded on Hitler's behalf in important government circles, and on the other hand, he lent his respectability and symbolic capital, bestowed on him by birth, to the

⁹² Ibid, p. 64.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 67.

National Socialist movement. In the end, “the crown prince did not bring about or navigate the coalition” of the old elites and National Socialism, “but he did everything in the power of a fallen crown prince to promote it”.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 69.

Impact of Wilhelm's Actions

As we have seen above, Malinowski regards Wilhelm as a highly influential go-between whose position as heir to the German throne guaranteed him a natural public influence. Yet, assessing the impact of his numerous actions vis-à-vis the National Socialist movement, Malinowski argues, is highly complicated. In the field of historical analysis, it is often almost impossible to establish a causal chain between action and impact. Thus, instead of examining every individual action of the crown prince separately, Malinowski rather tries to depict the crown prince's general impact by assessing, for example, the reactions of the press or high Nazi officials, as well as his visibility in the public.

Malinowski cites numerous newspaper articles in the domestic and foreign press to underline the continuous interest of the media in the crown prince's person. He mentions countless articles in the French, American and British press which extensively dealt with the question of a monarchical restoration throughout the spring and summer of 1932. The *London Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* apparently interpreted the appearance of Wilhelm and his brothers at a Stahlhelm rally in September 1932, where 150,000 men in uniform paraded on the field of Tempelhof (*Tempelhofer Feld*), as a clear indication of a future war of aggression and restoration of the Hohenzollern family.⁹⁵ (Surprisingly, Malinowski cites the German newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* in this context. The original article of the *London Times* on 5 September 1932,

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 80.

however, rather regards the Stahlhelm rally and the prominent appearance of various leading members of the government, as well as the crown prince, as a “rebuke to the Nazis”. There is neither any mention of a restoration, nor of a war of aggression.⁹⁶) Furthermore, Malinowski mentions articles in the foreign press, which once again discussed the scenario of a monarchical restoration following Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor in January 1933.⁹⁷ Various foreign and domestic newspapers apparently also picked up on an article the crown prince wrote in the spring of 1933 in which he rejected allegations of mistreatment of German Jews.⁹⁸

Malinowski also names Goebbels’ and Hitler’s fear of the crown prince’s charisma as an indication of Wilhelm’s influence. According to Goebbel’s diaries, Hitler saw in the crown prince one of the very few individuals who might be able to defeat him in the presidential election in 1932.⁹⁹ “During this crucial phase of the struggle for power,” Malinowski argued, “it is almost impossible to attribute more importance to a single individual.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Hitler’s decree to discharge all male members of formerly ruling princely families from military service in the spring of 1940 (*Prinzenerlass*), Malinowski notes, has to be seen as an expression of this fear. Following the death of Prince Wilhelm, the eldest son of the crown prince, on

⁹⁶ Rally of the Stahlhelm – Big Imperial Display – Rebuke to Nazis, *The Times*, 05.09.1932.

⁹⁷ In this context Malinowski cites an article in the German newspaper *Der Aufrechte*, which provided a short overview of the international press coverage: Wenn der Kaiser wiederkäme! Was würde “Europa” dazu sagen?, *Der Aufrechte*, 20.12.1932.

⁹⁸ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 81; Surprisingly, Malinowski does not provide any citations clarifying which foreign and domestic newspapers picked up on this article.

⁹⁹ Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil I, Aufzeichnungen 1923 -1941* (Munich, 2005), p. 294.

¹⁰⁰ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 73.

the Western Front on 26 May 1940, more than 50,000 people spontaneously lined the streets during his funeral at Potsdam.¹⁰¹ Hitler regarded this as a clear indication of the Hohenzollern's remaining potential drawing power, which might theoretically threaten his sole authority.

Finally, the appraisal refers to the uninterrupted public visibility of the crown prince. His countless appearances at Stahlhelm rallies, state funerals, SA parades, events of the NSKK (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrerkorps) and speeches of Hitler demonstrate that the crown prince, at least on a symbolic level, was a welcome guest whose presence at public events supplied the National Socialist movement with much needed credit. To illustrate the symbolic and political impact of such appearances, Malinowski referred to an instance in 1926 when the participation of the son of Crown Prince Wilhelm in a military manoeuvre of the Infantry Regiment 9 resulted in a veritable scandal. The symbolic and charismatic potential of a Hohenzollern Prince alongside a noble dominated elite formation of the army was perceived as a vital threat to the Weimar Republic, and ultimately, resulted in the dismissal of the head of the Supreme Army Command, General Hans von Seeckt. Thus the symbolic power of the imperial family, Malinowski argued, remained considerable throughout the interwar period and serves as a helpful indicator to assess the impact of Crown Prince Wilhelm's actions vis-à-vis the National Socialist regime.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Herre, *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, pp. 228–230; Gerd Heinrich, *Geschichte Preußens. Staat und Dynastie* (Frankfurt a. M., 1984), pp. 515–517.

¹⁰² Malinowski, *Gutachten*, p. 79.

Overall, Malinowski came to the conclusion which Brandenburg's minister of finance, Christian Goerke, had asked for. Malinowski unequivocally asserted that Crown Prince Wilhelm not only intentionally, but also consistently, provided the National Socialist regime with substantial assistance before, during and after its ascension to power. Furthermore, he concluded that although the crown prince cannot be regarded as one of the key instigators of the events that led to Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor in January 1933, his actions nevertheless had a lasting effect on the establishment and consolidation of the NS-regime.

Comparison of Clark and Malinowski

Unsurprisingly, as expert witnesses of opposing sides, Clark and Malinowski drew significantly diverging conclusions. To understand these diversions, however, one firstly has to look at how these conclusions were drawn. The first point that immediately comes to mind when reading these appraisals is the significant discrepancy in terms of length and depth. Whereas Clark's review confined itself to fifteen pages, Dr Malinowski spread his arguments over ninety-five pages. The reason for this marked disparity can be traced back to the fundamentally different job descriptions the two expert witnesses were initially presented with. Professor Clark was commissioned by the Hohenzollern family to assess a series of six distinct points, which had been specifically contested by the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues. In particular, he was asked to examine whether the crown prince's election recommendation for Hitler, his letters to Groener and Hitler, his

involvement in the Day of Potsdam, and his articles in the German press, qualified as intentional and consistent support of the National Socialist movement and whether these specific actions actually had the effect of improving the establishment, the development or the consolidation of the National Socialist system. Clark's appraisal is therefore a rather short and concise analysis of a limited source body, a fact that he explicitly notes in his introduction.

Dr Malinowski, however, was instructed to compose a comprehensive and complete inquiry of all the crown prince's actions vis-à-vis the National Socialist system throughout the interwar period – or anything that might relate him to the National Socialist movement – in an effort to construct an interpretation which would allow the minister of finance, Christian Goerke, to reject the Hohenzollern's claim for compensation. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that Dr Malinowski was not only not limited in the scope of his research, but had also been provided with Clark's appraisal in advance, a fact which allowed him to thoroughly and specifically challenge and counter Clark's arguments.¹⁰³

Although both appraisals come to fundamentally differing conclusions, there are actually various points in which both expert witnesses partly agree. Both describe Crown Prince Wilhelm as “a man whose political outlook was essentially reactionary, and who was willing, like many other figures on the ultra-conservative spectrum, to collaborate with the NSDAP”.¹⁰⁴ Clark does

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Crown Prince Wilhelm*, p. 7

not deny that Crown Prince Wilhelm at times “believed that he had something of importance to offer the National Socialists”¹⁰⁵ and therefore deliberately supported the National Socialist movement. Clark also rejects the claims of the apologetic literature, which tried to suggest that the prince entertained a “principled opposition to the regime or even an inner distance from the regime’s objectives”.¹⁰⁶

Both appraisals also partly concur in their assessment of the motives behind the crown prince’s actions. Clark considers Wilhelm’s actions to have been largely driven by self-interest, particularly by the “belief that it would be possible to use the NSDAP as a means [...] of securing an imperial restoration”.¹⁰⁷ Yet, at the same time, Clark regards this idea as utterly unrealistic and an expression of a drastic-overestimation of the crown prince’s own importance. It was, he contended, a notion “so far-fetched that it suggests a tendency towards delusions of grandeur”.¹⁰⁸ Although Malinowski also sees an imperial restoration at the heart of Wilhelm’s motives, he is unwilling to discount this as a pipedream. In Malinowski’s eyes, the crown prince was a key player in Weimar politics, who supposedly followed a deliberate plan as part of which the National Socialist movement was not simply a means to an end, but would play a crucial role in the state that would result. According to Malinowski Wilhelm not only wanted to ‘hire’ Hitler and his movement – which would have been a classic example of the *Zähmungskonzept* – but rather, intended to establish a new Führer-

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

monarchy along the fascist model installed in Italy.¹⁰⁹ Thus where Clark regards the crown prince as a delusional fantasist, unable to grasp the dangers and magnitude of a collaboration with the National Socialist movement, Malinowski considers him a calculating and convinced fascist whose master plan envisaged the erection of a National Socialist empire under his own leadership.

These diverging perceptions of the crown prince ultimately lead us to the point where both appraisals fundamentally diverge, namely the impact of Wilhelm's actions. Clark depicts the crown prince as an insignificant figure in the political landscape of the early 1930s, whose flight to Holland after the First World War and numerous scandals surrounding his private life had lastingly destroyed his reputation. In the final years of the Weimar Republic, he argues, Hindenburg had long-since taken over the role of *Ersatzkaiser* and redirected the monarchical focus in large parts of German society. Even in the case of a Hohenzollern restoration, a question that continuously resurfaced in the public debate throughout the interwar period, numerous voices demanded skipping the crown prince and instead lifting his eldest son, Wilhelm, or Alexander, the son of August-Wilhelm, onto the vacant throne.¹¹⁰ Wilhelm's actions, Clark therefore argued, particularly since they were restricted mainly to symbolic gestures, had no substantial impact on the establishment or consolidation of the National Socialist system.

¹⁰⁹ Malinowski, *Gutachten*, pp. 12, 13.

¹¹⁰ See exemplary: *MM – Der Montag Morgen*, 13.2.1933; *Gubener Zeitung*, 29.3.1933.

Malinowski, on the contrary, sees in the crown prince a major force in German politics. He mainly relates this to Wilhelm's inherited status as crown prince to the most powerful throne of continental Europe. According to him, the potential charisma of the former imperial family remained significant throughout the interwar period. The numerous occasions in which the crown prince directly or symbolically endorsed the National Socialist regime, he claimed, not only provided the young movement with much needed credibility, but helped to lower reservations against it at home and abroad.

In the end, this entire debate about substantial assistance remains a question of interpretation. Both appraisals come up with sound and comprehensible analyses of Wilhelm's actions vis-à-vis the National Socialist movement. The main issue, however, is that the consequences of his actions are not specifically quantifiable. Wilhelm certainly did not commit any major crimes that would qualify him as a major offender during the Third Reich. He was not a political tactician, such as Hugenberg or von Papen, who lifted Hitler into the Chancellery. Wilhelm also never fully devoted himself to the National Socialist ideology, nor did he play any significant political role in the Third Reich, a path that his brother August-Wilhelm willingly followed. As for the place of the Prussian crown prince against the larger background of German princely collaboration with the regime, it is safe to say that Wilhelm appears as one of the most politically reticent and least compromised personalities.¹¹¹ As a go-between and political propagandist for

¹¹¹ Jonathan Petropoulos, *Royals and the Reich*, passim, especially pp. 167–169.

the Nazi regime, however, he prominently endorsed Adolf Hitler, very visibly participated in numerous rallies and publically spoke out against defamations of the movement. Yet the 1994 compensation law specifies that actions intended to enhance the establishment of the regime or to consolidate it thereafter are not in themselves sufficient to qualify as substantial assistance. The decisive factor is the effect that these actions actually had. And therein lies the rub: in this case, a lasting effect can neither be established nor denied. In such situations, the penal law generally refers to a concept known as “in dubio pro reo”, allowing the defendant to walk free if his culpability cannot be verified beyond doubt.

The Rejection of the Hohenzollern Claim

By August, when Malinowski submitted his appraisal, the Hohenzollern had already hit the news. In January, 2014, someone within either the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues (Amt für offene Vermögensfragen) or from the Ministry of Finance, entrusted with overseeing restitution procedures, leaked the news that a report had just been received by the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues on the Hohenzollern case and that a decision in their favour had been reached.¹¹² This triggered a cascade of negative commentary in the press. ‘The Kaiser-Clan Bleeds the People Dry Again!’ roared the *Berliner Kurier*.¹¹³ ‘Money for the Old Monarchs’ was the title of a piece in *Neues Deutschland*, a socialist organ that

¹¹² Entschädigung für Hohenzollern – Talleur kritisiert Behördenleck, 26.02.2014, online at: <http://www.presseportal.de/pm/57699/2674041>.

¹¹³ Kaiser-Clan lässt Volk nochmal bluten, *Berliner Kurier*, 24.02.2014.

had been the official newspaper of the SED under the German Democratic Republic.¹¹⁴ The *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung* prominently discussed the “deep entanglement between the former imperial family and the Nazi regime”.¹¹⁵ It also printed an interview with the local politician Lutz Boede from the left-wing initiative “Potsdam without Garnisonskirche” who suggested that the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues “relativized the culpability of the Hohenzollern family”.¹¹⁶ And the historian Wolfgang Wippermann demanded in the *Deutschlandfunk* “anti-democrats shall not be rewarded for their deeds”.¹¹⁷

In the following month, as we have seen, Brandenburg’s Minister of Finance, Christian Görke, rescinded the decision and reopened the appraisal process. This not only led to jubilant comments in the leftist press – “No money for the Prussian Prince (Preussenprinz)”, “For now Prince Georg-Friedrich has to bid farewell to the anticipated money rain”¹¹⁸ – but also lifted the case into the focus of the national press. Large daily newspapers such as the *Focus* and *Die Welt* now covered the case.¹¹⁹ The *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung* even initiated a survey asking its readers whether the Hohenzollern should be

¹¹⁴ Moneten für die alten Monarchen, *Neues Deutschland*, 26.02.2014.

¹¹⁵ Der Sündenfall des Hauses Hohenzollern, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21.02.2014.

¹¹⁶ Familie erhebt Anspruch - Hohenzollern haben Recht auf Millionenentschädigung, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21.02.2014.

¹¹⁷ Hohenzollern – Antidemokraten nicht für ihr Handeln belohnen, *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 26.02.2014.

¹¹⁸ Vorerst kein Geld für den Preussenprinz, *Neues Deutschland*, 17.03.2014; Millionen eingefroren – Kaiser-Clan kriegt kein Geld, *Berliner Kurier*, 17.03.2014.

¹¹⁹ Görke greift ein, *Die Welt*, 15.03.2014; Entschädigung für Hohenzollern – Görke greift ein, *Focus*, 15.03.2014.

compensated. Out of more than ten thousand votes only thirty-two percent were in favour of it.¹²⁰

There was also mounting political pressure from the Green Party in Brandenburg, who presented a minor interpellation to parliament demanding that the Hohenzollerns not be compensated for the property they had lost.¹²¹ The Brandenburg Greens, a group at the leftmost end of the spectrum of German Green politics, declared that it was “outraged” to hear of the possible restitution of Hohenzollern properties. In their eyes, “Crown Prince Wilhelm and other princes – as prominent participants in the Day of Potsdam – had been important *Steigbügelhalter* of Adolf Hitler”.¹²² Public pressure was amplified by the fact that another unidentified source, most likely from within the ministry of finance, in August 2014, and hence more than a month before the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues finished its final report, leaked Malinowski’s appraisal to the press.¹²³ The left-wing newspaper *Der Spiegel* opened with an article that not only disclosed Malinowski’s conclusions, but also proposed a rejection of the Hohenzollern claim. The Hohenzollern restitution question, *Spiegel* journalist Klaus Wiegrefe claimed, was “a veritable Historikerstreit”. It turned after

¹²⁰ Sollten die Hohenzollern für Enteignungen entschädigt werden?, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17.03.2014

¹²¹ Kleine Anfrage 25.03.2014, Mögliche Entschädigungszahlungen an Erben des Hauses Hohenzollern, online at: <http://www.gruene-fraktion-brandenburg.de/im-parlament/kleine-anfragen/moegliche-entschaedigungszahlungen-an-erben-des-hauses-hohenzollern/?L=0>.

¹²² Hohenzollern haben Recht auf Millionen-Entschädigung, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 21.02.2014; Brandenburgische Geschichtsvergessenheit – Streit um die Rolle der Hohenzollern, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 05.03.2014.

¹²³ Hohenzollern erstatten Strafanzeige, *Neues Deutschland*, 13.09.2014; Steuergelder für Kaisernachfahren?, *SPIEGEL*, 14.12.2014; Preußenprinz bittet zur Kasse, *Hohenzollerische Zeitung*, 16.12.2014.

all, on the “capital question” of Germany recent history: “how Hitler had managed to rise from homeless man in Austria to the leader of Europe’s most important industrial power”. In the light of the expertise presented, Wiegrefe went on, the result was foreseeable: “The claim of the former royal family for compensation by the taxpayer will most likely be rejected.”¹²⁴ Other newspapers published similar articles in the following days. The *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten* prominently highlighted Malinowski’s conclusion that the crown prince had significantly contributed to the enhancement of the Nazis’ respectability and had decreased reservations against the regime at home and abroad.¹²⁵ And the *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung* stated that “Prussia’s dynasty had been too heavily entangled with the Nazi-leaders” in order to be eligible for compensation.¹²⁶ In August 2015, Malinowski entered the public debate personally with an article in *Die Zeit* that ran under the title: ‘The Brown Crown Prince’. In it, he summarised the arguments of his appraisal adding that the only possible judgement on the basis of the evidence must fall against the Hohenzollern.¹²⁷

In the end, the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues bowed to the political and public pressure and withdrew its original decision from December 2013 in which it had signalled its approval of the Hohenzollern’s claim. Its final report, published in January 2016, adopted Malinowski’s line

¹²⁴ Prinz mit Schuss, *SPIEGEL*, 08.09.2014.

¹²⁵ Hohenzollern wohl ohne Entschädigung, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 08.09.2014.

¹²⁶ Preußen-Dynastie und Nazi-Führer zu sehr verstrickt: Entschädigung für Hohenzollern ungewiss, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 08.09.2014.

¹²⁷ Der braune Kronprinz, *Die Zeit*, 30.08.2015

of argument;¹²⁸ a financial compensation was not granted. The Hohenzollern were unwilling to accept this ruling and have since filed a lawsuit against the decision at the administrative court in Potsdam. It was decided to augment the earlier expert testimony with a further appraisal by Professor Wolfram Pyta. Pyta appears to have found exactly what the Hohenzollerns need. Whereas Clark and Malinowski focused on symbolic and rhetorical gestures by the prince, coming to opposed views on their significance, Pyta has focused his attention on the precise nature of the prince's involvement with conservative circles close to the government at the end of the Weimar Republic. His investigations have already thrown up evidence suggesting that the crown prince was involved in a last minute attempt to prevent the appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor. In February 2016, the Hohenzollern leaked information to the press, prompting the publication in *Die Welt* of an article entitled: 'How the Prussian Crown Prince tried to Prevent Hitler'. According to this article the crown prince was at the centre of an intrigue in January 1933 designed to divide the NSDAP and side-line Hitler. Reich Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher and the crown prince apparently intended to convince the moderate wing of the NSDAP, under the leadership of Gregor Strasser, to break with Hitler and join into a coalition government with "pragmatic representatives of the Social Democratic unions" under the leadership of Schleicher.¹²⁹ Hitler's inability to

¹²⁸ See: Bescheidsentwurf bzgl. Ansprüche SKH Herrn Georg Friedrich Prinz von Preußen auf im heutigen Bundesland Brandenburg gelegene Immobilien, Landkreis Oder-Spree, Amt zur Regelung offener Vermögensfragen, 24.09.2014, Hausarchiv des vormals regierenden preußischen Königshauses (Berlin).

¹²⁹ So wollte Preußens Kronprinz Hitler verhindern, *Welt*, 11.02.2016.

accept anything but total power¹³⁰ would have inevitably led to a breakup of the NSDAP. Although Strasser was by no means a democrat, but rather a fascist along the lines of Mussolini, he neither shared with Hitler the radical hatred for the Jews, nor did he intend to start another world war.¹³¹ This in turn would seem to support Clark's claim that the nature of the prince's relationship with National Socialism was conditional and instrumental, rather than founded on consistent support for the party or its ideology.

If the above scenario was to be confirmed, this could have tremendous implications on the upcoming trial. In a similar case, the Federal Administrative Court of Germany ruled that any substantial assistance provided by the defendant could – in special cases – be neglected if the defendant had undeniably been involved in an attempt to prevent or overthrow the regime, even if this attempt might not have been successful.¹³² In that case, the whole debate surrounding the impact of Crown Prince Wilhelm's actions might be rendered void. A final ruling, however, is not expected for several years.

As the Hohenzollern case reveals, the legislative environment in Germany obliges some families to engage in history management. If they do not manage their history, someone else will, and the financial implications can be

¹³⁰ See for example Hitler's reply to the crown prince's in September 1932 in which Hitler flat out refused Wilhelm's request to join a coalition government. Letter Adolf Hitler to Crown Prince Wilhelm, Munich, 28.09.1932, GStA, BPH, Rep. 54 Nr. 137–2.

¹³¹ So wollte Preußens Kronprinz Hitler verhindern, *Welt*, 11.02.2016.

¹³² Entschädigung für Enteignung eines Ritterguts eines Enkels des Reichskanzlers von Bismarck?, Pressemitteilung Bundesverwaltungsgericht, Nr. 57/2009, BVerwG 5 C 1.09, 18.09.2009, online at: <http://www.bverwg.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilung.php?jahr=2009&nr=57>.

substantial. This is especially true for areas in East Germany, which are still governed by DIE LINKE, the successor party of the former German Democratic Republic's Socialist Unity Party (SED). In East Germany, the nobility was expropriated, expelled and publicly stigmatised. For decades after the war, their history was portrayed as a succession of exploitation, suppression and military aggression. This state-sponsored management of the nobility's history was designed to justify their expulsion and legitimise the expropriations. More than two decades after the fall of the communist system in East Germany, the salience of such narratives is scarcely diminished. As the intervention of Brandenburg's minister of finance demonstrated, representatives of the far left are not only willing to defend these narratives, but also to take concerted action when they are challenged.

How differently restitution cases can be handled if there is neither public nor political pressure exerted can be observed in another formerly East German state. In Thuringia, a province that has been governed by the Christian Democrats (Christlich Demokratische Union, CDU) between 1990 and 2014, the government took a much more liberal and unbiased approach when it came to compensating former princely families expropriated between 1945 and 1949. Here, Dr Jürgen Aretz, state secretary in the Ministry of Science, Research and Art (Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst), was specially assigned to handle the often highly complicated restitution cases. In discrete negotiations, Dr Aretz reached compromise settlements with numerous old noble families. Among them were the princely houses of Sachsen-Weimar Eisenach, Sachsen-Meiningen and Saxe Coburg and

Gotha.¹³³ The princely house of Reuß also found a compromise with the city of Gera.¹³⁴ In this way, lengthy and protracted legal battles with uncertain outcomes which, as illustrated, can often take decades, could be avoided.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, history management can be a very powerful tool for fostering and improving a family's reputation in the present. For a family to be successful in such an endeavour, they cannot arouse the suspicion that they are strategically attempting to manipulate the record. Their efforts must remain subtle and discrete. Autobiographies, family chronicles and carefully staged home stories are ideally suited in this context, since they allow the protagonist subliminally to convey his or her own interpretation of history without being exposed to substantial scholarly critique. Even more important, however, is the control of focus and information. Active history management allows people not only to influence which parts of their family history they wish to address, but also to decide how much information they are willing to disclose. The key to successful history management is directing the focus of attention towards the beneficial

¹³³ Nur über das Schloss Burgk wird noch verhandelt, *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, 15.01.2015; Thüringer Landtag billigt Einigung mit Weimarer Adelshaus, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 04.07.2003; Also see: Hellmut Seemann, Restitution – Nur Last oder auch Lust der Wiedervereinigung. Ein kritischer Erfahrungsbericht aus der Klassikstiftung Weimar, in: Cornelia Munzinger-Brandt (ed.), *Museumsgut und Eigentumsfragen* (Halle, 2012), p. 21 (pp. 15–24).

¹³⁴ Streit um Status der Geraer Silbermöbel, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27.09.2006; Tauziehen um die Immobilien des Thüringer Adelsgeschlechts Reuß, *Welt*, 14.06.2005.

aspects of one's family's past, while either marginalising compromising facts or removing them altogether from the field of vision.

An engagement with the past, however, can be dangerous when a family loses control over the process, manifested in the case of the Hohenzollern. As illustrated, the moralising dimension of the 1994 compensation law forced the Hohenzollern to address a section of their family's past, which, under normal circumstances, they most likely would have been eager to avoid. Due to the magnitude of the crimes committed during the Second World War and the enormous level of complicity among the German population, the history of the Third Reich – even seventy years after its downfall – hangs like Damocles' sword over the German nation. Unless a family has been prominently involved in the resistance against the Nazi regime, the Third Reich is not a topic suited to generating positive symbolic capital. It is a reputational minefield, which is to be evaded where possible.

Nevertheless, from the Hohenzollern's perspective, the restitution process initially appeared to be controllable. According to usual practice, the restitution case started out as discrete and impartial negotiations between the Hohenzollern and the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues. After years of research, the competent government agency signalled its approval of restitution. Only when Brandenburg's minister of finance intervened and dragged the case into the public sphere did things begin to get out of hand for the Hohenzollern. They were all of a sudden confronted on two fronts. They faced significant political opposition, as well as a largely hostile media, which turned this initially private inquiry into a highly

politicised public controversy about the family's conduct during the Third Reich. The negative implications of this situation were twofold. A compensation for their material losses suffered after the Second World War was rejected. More importantly, however, the detailed coverage in the press of the crown prince's activities vis-à-vis the National Socialist movement led to a veritable PR-disaster. Leading German newspapers published large articles, citing Malinowski's evaluation of the crown prince, and portraying the Hohenzollern as a family who had actively and willingly assisted the rise of Adolf Hitler. *Die Zeit* called Wilhelm "The Brown Crown Prince", the *SPIEGEL* styled him the "The Dorky Prince" (Prinz mit Schuss) and the *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung* referred to Wilhelm's conduct during the Third Reich as the "capital sin of the house Hohenzollern" (Sündenfall des Hauses Hohenzollern).¹³⁵ Thus, this case vividly demonstrates that if a family is forced to react to external pressure rather than proactively orchestrate their own history management, the entire process, which originally was intended to improve the family's standing, can significantly backfire.

This is further exemplified by the family's reaction to the critical articles published in the press just before the Office for the Settlement of Open Property Issues finalised its verdict in September 2014. The Hohenzollern filed a lawsuit for 'betrayal of secrets' (*Geheimnisverrat*), claiming that the information the article referred to had been illegally handed to the press.¹³⁶ Furthermore, they attempted to obtain a preliminary injunction against the

¹³⁵ Der braune Kronprinz, *Die Zeit*, 30.08.2015; Prinz mit Schuss, *SPIEGEL*, 08.09.2014; Der Sündenfall des Hauses Hohenzollern, *Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21.02.2014.

¹³⁶ Steuergelder für Kaisernachfahren?, *SPIEGEL*, 14.12.2014. In this context, the closest English equivalent to "Geheimnisverrat" is probably "contempt of court".

land Brandenburg to prevent them from commenting on the restitution procedure.¹³⁷ Their initial idea was to prevent the public debate from getting out of control. Instead, this approach caused considerable public indignation and negative reactions in the press.¹³⁸ The Hohenzollern were accused of trying to bend the historical truth and muzzle the press.¹³⁹ Nothing could better illustrate the delicate endeavour of history management.

¹³⁷ Entschädigung für enteignete Schlösser in Brandenburg abgelehnt: Keine Steuermillionen für Hohenzollern, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 15.01.2016.

¹³⁸ Millionen eingefroren: Kaiser Clan will Geld für Berliner Grundstücke, *Berliner Kurier*, 15.12.2014; Hohenzollern wohl ohne Entschädigung, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 07.09.2014; Preussen-Prinz bittet Berlin zur Kasse, *Hohenzollerische Zeitung*, 16.12.2014; Preußen Dynastie und Nazi-Führer zu sehr verstrickt: Entschädigung für Hohenzollern ungewiss, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 07.09.2014; Der braune Kronprinz, *Die Zeit*, 27.08.2015; Der Sündenfall des Hauses Hohenzollern, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 24.02.2014.

¹³⁹ Keine Steuermillionen für Hohenzollern, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 15.01.2016; Hohenzollern versuchen es mit Maulkorb, *Märkische Allgemeine*, 15.01.2016; Kein Geld für die Hohenzollern, *Tagesspiegel*, 14.01.2016.

Conclusions

This dissertation is about the constructability of the past. It has examined the efforts of the East-Elbian nobility to refurbish its image and its historical identity after the Second World War. Like other groups from the areas most affected by the fighting in 1944 and 1945, the nobilities of East Elbia struggled to gain lost ground after their mass expulsion to the West. They reconstituted their commercial networks and used what remained of their inside connections to industry, forestry, diplomacy, the arts and agriculture to rebuild their independence and prosperity. At the same time, however, they worked hard to repair their reputation. This had always been an elite intensely conscious of reputational capital – a resource sometimes captured in the neuralgic concept of ‘honour’. As this thesis has shown, they demonstrated remarkable ingenuity, determination and collective purpose in purging their corporate past of contaminants, recuperating the ideals of independence and social responsibility that supposedly justified their elevated social status, and merging the canon of noble ‘virtue’ with the political ones that sustained the official rhetoric of the Federal Republic. They helped to establish the military coup as the defining aspect of the anti-Hitler resistance and the foundation of the new Germany. They succeeded having this coup recognised not just as a noble achievement, but also as an unforgettable historical expression of noble attributes. They took part in the transfiguration of the German east into a lost *Heimat* with a claim to the sympathy of all sensitive Germans. They secured their own collective identity through a myriad of idealisations of their family histories. Further, those with a claim to estates in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic deployed the resources accumulated through these efforts to re-

establish themselves as a landed elite wielding an authority supposedly bestowed by history. Nothing could illustrate more clearly the tight nexus between managing the past and flourishing in the present.

Such efforts to manage their own history are by no means a unique feature of the East-Elbian nobility. For decades after the war, especially large German corporations, as well as government agencies, tried systematically to trivialise their entanglement with the Third Reich. Scholars were regularly denied access to corporate archives, compromising files mysteriously disappeared in the shredder, and sponsored commemorative publications blatantly ignored the complicity of large parts of Germany's heavy industry in Hitler's war of exploitation.

In 1970, in celebration of its centenary, the Deutsche Bank commissioned a 450-page monograph, which devoted less than twenty pages to the period of the Third Reich. There was no mention of the bank's large-scale involvement in the 'Aryanization' process, its expansion into Eastern Europe during the Second World War, or the financing of enterprises responsible for the construction of Auschwitz.⁸⁹¹ Instead, the chronicle bemoaned the lack of investment opportunities during the war and the difficulties faced by the bank in fulfilling its credit targets.⁸⁹² Daimler Benz also studiously ignored its large-scale use of forced labour throughout the Third Reich. As late as 1986, an official two-volume chronicle of the company's 100-year history dedicated as little as two pages to this highly sensitive topic.⁸⁹³ Other large corporations,

⁸⁹¹ See especially the chapter *Foreign Expansion* in: Harold James, *The Nazi Dictatorship and the Deutsche Bank* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 108–189; Also see the chapter *Deutsche Bank Abroad: "Aryanization", Territorial Expansion, and Economic Reordering* in: Harold James, *The Deutsche Bank and the Nazi Economic War Against the Jews – The Expropriation of Jewish-Owned Property* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 127–195.

⁸⁹² Fritz Seidenzahl, *100 Jahre Deutsche Bank 1870–1970* (Frankfurt a. M., 1970), pp. 357–374.

⁸⁹³ Die Herren nahmen nur die Kräftigsten, *SPIEGEL*, 07.04.1986.

such as Degussa, Volkswagen and the Dresdner Bank, also went to great length to curtail their roles as “willing supporters” of the Nazi regime.⁸⁹⁴

Similar behaviour is also well-known for government agencies. For decades, Germany’s Federal Intelligence Agency (Bundesnachrichtendienst, BND), deliberately concealed its practice of hiring highly compromised war criminals during the formative years of the Federal Republic. Its founder, Reinhard Gehlen, a former Nazi general responsible for counter-espionage on the eastern front, had not only offered shelter to hundreds of former Nazis in his headquarters in Pullach, but also used the services of former Gestapo and SS personnel, such as Klaus Barbie to support anti-communist regimes in South America.⁸⁹⁵ In fact, every tenth employee of the BND had previously worked for Himmler’s SS.⁸⁹⁶ For years, the BND systematically prevented historians and journalists access to its archive under the pretext of protecting its agents.⁸⁹⁷ Even as late as 2007, the agency still shredded more than 250 files of former members of the Gestapo, SD and SS in an attempt to disguise their post-war careers in the BND.⁸⁹⁸

The Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, AA) pursued an even more forthright strategy. Throughout the Third Reich, it had been a crucial link in Hitler’s war of exploitation and annihilation. It had not only strategically tried to restrict Germany’s loss of reputation in the wake of the Nazis’ policy against the

⁸⁹⁴ Dresdner Bank im Dritten Reich: Hitlers willige Banker, *SPIEGEL*, 17.02.2006; Der Führer und sein Tüftler, *SPIEGEL*, 04.11.1996.

⁸⁹⁵ See: Peter Hammerschmidt, *Deckname Adler: Klaus Barbie und die westlichen Geheimdienste* (Frankfurt a. M., 2014), pp. 197–222.

⁸⁹⁶ NS-Verbrecher im BND: Eine zweite Entnazifizierung, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18.03.2010.

⁸⁹⁷ See exemplary the interviews with the historian Peter Hammerschmidt: Geheimakte Barbie, *der Freitag*, 25.02.2012; Ausgeprägte antikommunistische Haltung: Wie Nazikriegsverbrecher Klaus Barbie seine rechtsextreme Karriere im Dienste der USA und des BND fortsetzte. Ein Exklusivinterview mit dem Historiker Peter Hammerschmidt, *Telepolis*, 17.01.2011.

⁸⁹⁸ BND vernichtete Personalakten früherer SS-Leute, *SPIEGEL*, 29.11.2011.

Jews, but it had also actively supported the planning, preparation and execution of the Final Solution.⁸⁹⁹ Yet, after the Second World War, it constructed the myth of the clean Foreign Office as “untainted by the crimes of the Third Reich and a centre of anti-Nazi opposition”.⁹⁰⁰ In an official brochure in 1979, the Foreign Office encapsulated its role during the Third Reich in a few sentences: “The AA tenaciously resisted the plans of the Nazi regime without being able to prevent the worst. For a long time the AA remained an ‘apolitical’ agency and was known to the National Socialists as a stronghold of opposition”.⁹⁰¹ On top of this blatant transfiguration of its role in the Third Reich, the Foreign Office – like the BND – also restricted access to its archives.⁹⁰² Independent scholarly research, which might tarnish the carefully composed image of an isolated bastion of anti-Nazi resistance, was not desired.

Unlike the nobility, however, these corporations and government agencies eventually changed their strategy. From the late 1980s, they began actively to acknowledge their entanglement in the Third Reich. In 1985, Deutsche Bank acquired the Flick conglomerate. In the course of this transaction, the bank unexpectedly transferred five million Deutschmark to the Jewish Claims Conference (JCC). For years, Flick had refused to pay compensation for its large-scale use of forced labour during the Second World War. By clandestinely settling the JCC’s claim, Deutsche Bank hoped to avoid a protracted debate in the German press. This attempted cover up, however, had the exactly opposite effect. The press widely picked up on the story, and

⁸⁹⁹ Eckart Conze, Peter Hayes, Norbert Frei and Moshe Zimmermann (eds), *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit – Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich, 2010), pp. 167–169.

⁹⁰⁰ Christopher R. Browning, The German Foreign Office Revisited, *Bulletin of the GHI*, 49 (2011), p. 72.

⁹⁰¹ Conze, Hayes, Frei and Zimmermann (eds), *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, p. 12.

⁹⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 694–696.

an intensive public debate about Germany's exploitation of foreign workers during the Second World War ensued.⁹⁰³ Although only reluctantly, and by no means voluntarily, this public pressure gradually encouraged Germany's large corporations and government agencies to have their involvement in the crimes of the Nazi regime examined by external historians.⁹⁰⁴ Over time, they realised that a transparent re-appraisal of the company's history, even of its darkest chapters, could actually lead to positive publicity in the long run.

The nobility, in contrast, remains unwilling to comprehensively reappraise the true dimensions of its complicity in the Third Reich. "To this day, the collective memories of these families appear to be trapped in a mindscape, which does not allow any stain on their 'shield of honour'. This is especially surprising since nowadays the realisation should have manifested itself that especially the concerted attempt to repel or divert culpability will inevitably leave even more severe stains."⁹⁰⁵ To be sure, the nobility is not exposed to the kind of public pressure that has been brought to bear on large corporations and government agencies. The nobility is neither accountable to shareholders, nor consumers, nor an electorate. In the absence of any real political or social power, the nobility's societal role has been reduced to a kind of low-level

⁹⁰³ Henning Borggräfe, *Deutsche Unternehmen und das Erbe der NS-Zwangsarbeit. Verlauf und Folgen des Streits um Entschädigung seit den 1990er Jahren*, in: Jörg Osterloh und Harald Wixforth (eds), *Unternehmer und NS-Verbrechen: Wirtschaftseliten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 2014), p. 369.

⁹⁰⁴ Lothar Gall, Karin Schambach, Norma von Ragenfeld-Feldman, Hans Büschgen, Harold James (eds), *Deutsche Bank 1870–1925. 125 Jahre Deutsche Wirtschafts- und Finanzgeschichte* (Munich, 1995); Peter Hayes, *Die Degussa im Dritten Reich – Von der Zusammenarbeit zur Mittäterschaft* (Munich, 2005); Hans Mommsen und Manfred Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf, 1996); Conze, Hayes, Frei and Moshe Zimmermann (eds), *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*; Unabhängige Historikerkommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte des Bundesnachrichtendienstes 1945–1968, online at: <http://www.uhk-bnd.de>; Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Johannes Bähr, Harald Wixforth, Dieter Ziegler (eds), *Die Dresdner Bank im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 2006).

⁹⁰⁵ Marcus Funck, *The Empire Strikes Back. Oder: Der königliche Griff nach Deutungsmacht*, online at: <http://starke-meinungen.de/blog/2016/02/16/the-empire-strikes-back-oder-der-griff-aus-der-gruft-nach-deutungsmacht/>.

collective celebrity status. As supposedly apolitical figures, they serve as a beacon for how life can be lived, unburdened by the mundane worries and tasks of a meritocratic society.⁹⁰⁶ The great majority of the population today is less interested in the nobility's fateful role in the great crises of the twentieth century than in romantic images of fairy-tale weddings, glamorous home stories or contemporary scandals. In order to maintain this celebrity status, and therefore, at least a residual degree of social elitism, the nobility will doubtless continue to construct a hearth of fables and legends over which to warm its hands, rather than excavate its troubling corporate past.

⁹⁰⁶ Joachim Renn, Faszination Adel – Popularität unzeitgemäßer Standesprivilegien als Problem der Demokratie, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (15/2014), p. 120.

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